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Rhythm

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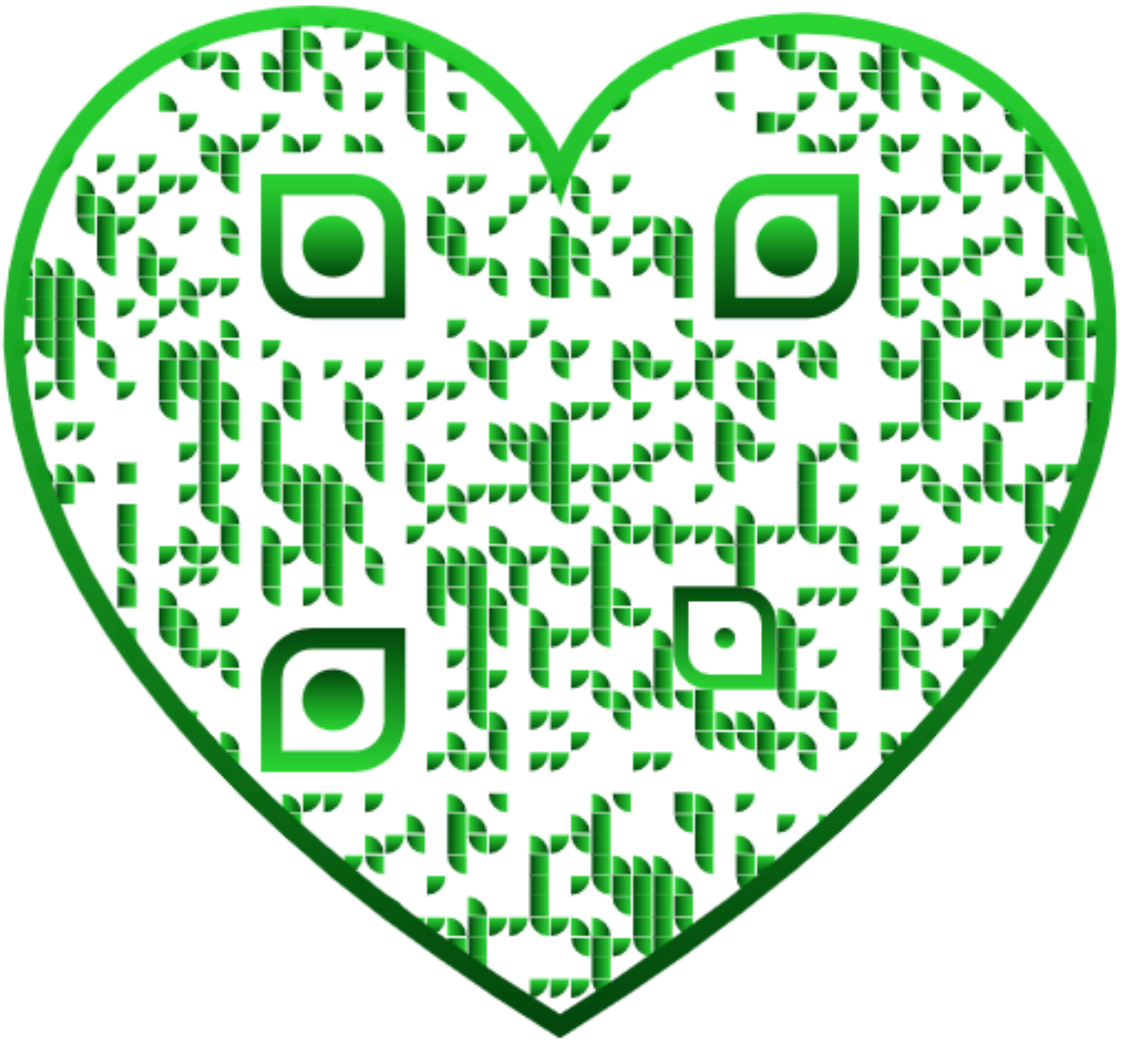

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HELLO AND WELCOME BACK TO RHYTHM...

We all have our own groove, but what exactly is it, why is it so important and how can we improve it? From my experience, it's a wonderful pulse with great syncopation that feels good and makes people want to move.

As drummers, we are the engine room of the band. We control the tempo – the heartbeat – and ultimately determine how a track feels. Finding the groove and pocket can be one of the hardest things, but when we do, it's almost like an out-of-body experience, and *everyone* in the band – and the audience – knows it. It's a physical feeling.

I've always been drawn to drummers that groove, and – thanks to my Dad's great vinyl collection – I grew up listening to the likes of Toto, Steely Dan, Little Feat, The Eagles, Level 42, George Benson, Tower Of Power, Kool & The Gang, The Bee Gees, Bread, Led Zeppelin, AC/DC, Lionel Ritchie, Little River Band, It Bites and anything Motown... All of those records have great songs and rhythm sections, and all of those records make me want to play drums or dance.

Being exposed to those amazing musicians at such a young age was a fantastic education, and set me on my own path of wanting to become a drummer that plays songs. To this day, every time I hear a great groove I'm inspired to jump on the kit and start playing myself – the power of a killer beat and a fantastic feel is infectious!

Putting together this special issue of *Rhythm*, dedicated to groove and feel and what it means to different players, has been so interesting and really informative. The four drummers I've chosen to talk to – John JR Robinson, Mickey Curry, Ben Thatcher and Alex Torjussen – all have incredible musicianship and are very creative when it comes to their fills and what they choose to do in the gaps.

I'm intrigued by how we as drummers come up with parts and ideas – almost without thinking about it – and how we develop our natural time, groove, pocket and feel. Hearing from four such different players, all at different stages of their careers, has been very insightful, and there is so much to learn and take away from them all. As there is from the top tips and advice coming from the likes of Jim Keltner, Steve Jordan, Andy Newmark and Zigaboo Modeliste, who all share their thoughts on what groove means to them personally and how you can improve yours.

We also pay a very special tribute to one of my greatest drum influences – and the king of groove in my opinion – the one and only Jeff Porcaro. And I'm thrilled to have had the opportunity to chat about Jeff with his close friends and fellow bandmates, Leland Sklar and Steve Lukather.

Hope you enjoy the issue!

Image: Anna Imm

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Image: Anna Imm

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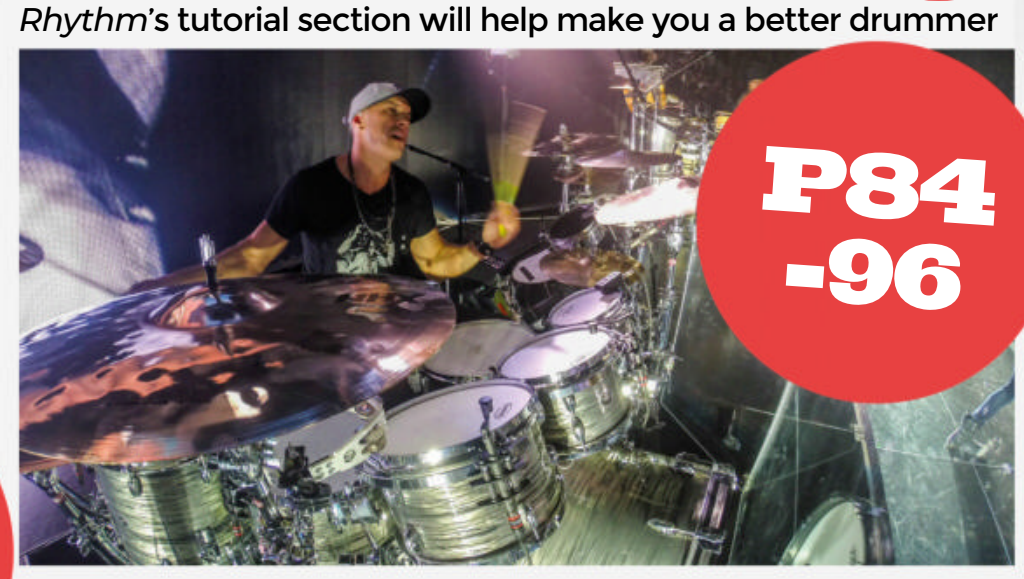
Rhythm's tutorial section will help make you a better drummer



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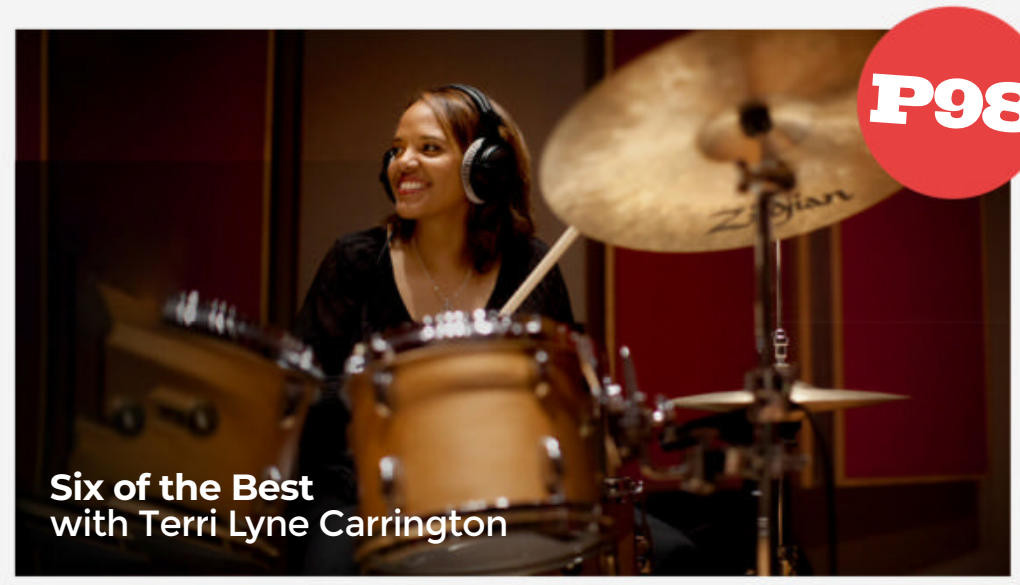

Beat!

People | Music | Gear

Image: James Cumpsty

HANG TIME

Drum Gods Streaming Into Our Living Rooms

Vinnie Colaiuta. Bernard Purdie (pictured). Simon Phillips. Steve Gadd... All A-list drummers for sure, but also only a handful of incredible alumni from the ever-growing Drum Hangs livestream.

The brainchild of drum industry veteran Russ Gleason and session supremo Neal Wilkinson, Drum Hangs is a Zoom-based series of livestreams with the great and good of the drum world. Like many such streams, its origin lays in lockdown.

"About a month into the pandemic, the idea came to me," Russ explains. "I was talking to my great friend and top session drummer Neal Wilkinson regularly, and one day we decided to chat on Zoom. We would be by our drums and play ideas as we both weren't really doing much practice at the time – we had the 'Pandemic Blues' if you will. After about two hours we both came away feeling good, and I suggested to Neal that we should invite people we knew the next week."

And so Drum Hangs was born. Since then, the livestream with drumming royalty has continued to grow, with drummers across the world having logged in and paid a small fee per session to join in (special offers have included £10 a stream if you opt in to nine events within a month).

"The whole point of Drum Hangs is to support our favourite musicians whilst keeping drummers connected," Russ says. "Connecting Drummers Worldwide is our tagline, and that's really what we have been able to do – connecting drummers and musicians from more than 40 countries around the world! We have had most of the legendary drummers on Drum Hangs, and it has been nothing short of incredible."

This isn't your average drum lesson with a star, it is instead an intimate meeting. And while the event may be billed as being with one artist, you never know who might log on...

"Steve Gadd has appeared twice at Drum Hangs," continues Russ, "which is a dream come true. The first time he was on, everyone showed up for it – and I mean everyone! It was just out of this world. To hear Steve and Vinnie Colaiuta chatting about the challenges of traditional grip, and then to hear Steve talking with Ed Greene about the groove was just unbelievable."

Looking ahead to the future, Russ admits that Drum Hangs could potentially hit the road once lockdown is lifted, but that doesn't mean that the streaming is set to end.

"These kinds of events aren't going away," he says. "They will evolve and improve. In May we celebrate our 1st birthday, and we really feel that the possibilities are endless with the technology now available to us. Drum Hangs has firmly established itself as the world's leading platform in this area. We will continue to do what we do long after lockdown is gone. I mean who doesn't want to hang out with their favourite drummers in a relaxed, informal setting and be able to interact with them in real time?"

To stay up to date with the latest announcements from Drum Hangs, register at www.drumhangs.com to become a member.

Introducing

LUKA VAN DE POEL

Old-school sounds from this vintage-loving Dutch master of groove

Playing drums is not just about playing drums, it's playing together with friends," says Luka van de Poel. "It's a social instrument." The drummer formed DeWolff with his guitarist brother, Pablo, and Robin Piso on organ when he was just 12. When their 2020 tour was abruptly halted by the pandemic, the trio regrouped at home in Utrecht to write new music, resulting in their latest outpouring of funky blues rock, *Wolffpack*.

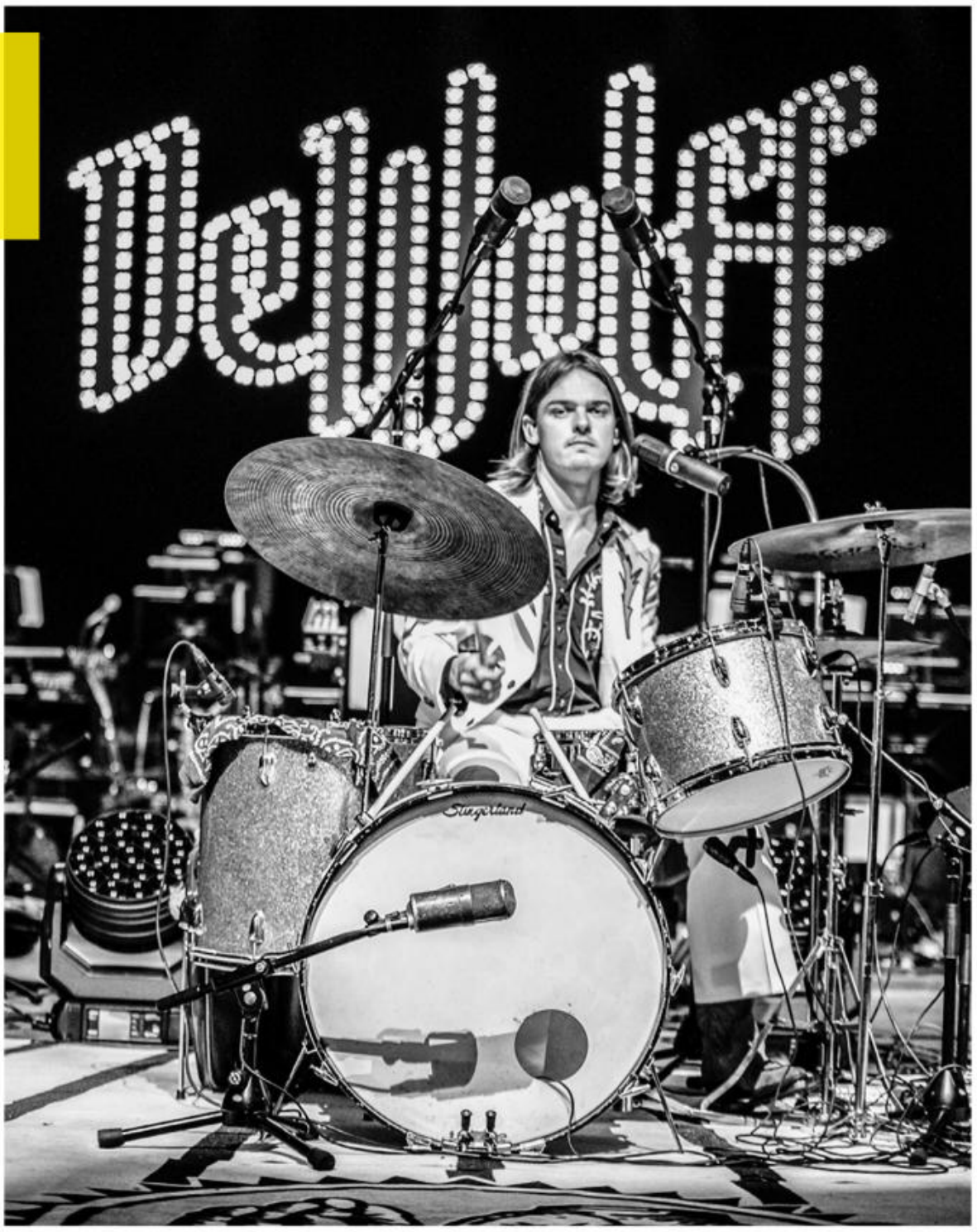

Image: Tineke Klamer

Where did you record *Wolffpack*?

"In our own Electrosaurus Studio. It's a 13th-century cellar. We have a 24-track tape recorder here – we try to record most things analogue. It has to breathe and live and be organic. When you record to tape, it has this depth and warmth. You can put everything into the red and then it sounds so juicy and buttery. That's what we like."

How do you approach creating grooves?

"We're just the three of us, so there's a lot of room for drums. When we started, I was playing a lot and filling up the empty gaps. Through the years I learned to back up and let Pablo and Robin speak. I was really inspired by drummers like Mitch Mitchell and Buddy Rich, but I learned to let the music breathe.

"When we started, we wanted to be a jam band, play songs for 20 minutes with a lot of solos. Led Zeppelin is still one of our biggest inspirations. Over the years, we've started listening to old soul, Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, Toussaint McCall, Allen Toussaint. In the beginning it was all about long

songs and solos, then we started appreciating songwriting."

What drums did you play on *Wolffpack*?

"An early '50s [Gretsch] Broadkaster. It was once White Marine Pearl, but someone took off the wrapping. When I bought it, it was pretty ugly, pretty damaged. I painted it with nitrocellulose lycra. It's a copper colour, because Gretsch had this copper mist colour back in the '50s which was totally beautiful, and I wanted a replica. I used that on some songs, and I used a WFL from 1965. These kits sound totally different, but they sound classic and that's what I like."

Can you find vintage gear in the Netherlands?

"I have to import it. A friend of mine imports American classic cars. They put the cars on a ship in a container and there is always extra room for some boxes. He just puts in a drum kit. It's way cheaper that putting it on an airplane."

How did you learn to drum and sing simultaneously?

"In the beginning, I did background vocals, but it's really something else if you want to sing a lead part and play a groove. Pablo completely lost his voice on a tour. We had a big show in Germany and Pablo was like, 'Luka, please, can you do the vocals?' I was like, 'Well, if you give me some lyrics maybe I can try'. From that moment on I started to really enjoy singing." **David West**

Key kit: *Vintage Gretsch drums, Istanbul Agop cymbals, Vic Firth sticks, Ludwig Speed King pedal*

SLOWLY BUT SURELY WINS THE RACE

Drum-Ed launches the 'ultimate practise app'

Practising along to your favourite songs sounds like a great idea, but, if we're honest, it can be a total nightmare. First, you have to turn the track up to deafening levels to hear it over your own playing. Then, your kit sounds completely alien alongside the original track. And trying to nail that insane fill in the second chorus first time at full speed? Forget it.

Well, that may all be a thing of the past thanks to Time To Play, a brand-new app from Drum-Ed, the company cofounded by Embrace drummer Mike Heaton.

The app, which is available as a free download on Apple's App Store, allows players to practise along to their own music and, even better, slow down the tempos to help you nail it from start to finish. Not only that, but the app features a host of backing tracks and EQ options. Plus, for a monthly subscription fee of £1.99, you get additional custom-written backing tracks each month split into five sections.

Heaton, who is joined by Steve White and highly regarded educator Rich Wilson at Drum-Ed, reveals he spent two years working on it: "Everyone wants to play along with their favourite bands, and I wanted that experience to be as good as it possibly could be, and to have the ability to slow and speed up the songs in real time".

But just playing along to tracks wasn't enough for Heaton and company. "On a mobile phone, the microphone is just for speech really," explains Mike, "so a drum kit coming through it could sound a bit pony. We thought about all of the effects for the app, and now have EQ, which makes a huge difference. You've got reverb, distortion, your Stewart Copeland-type delay...

"I wrote and recorded about 50 loops for the app, which you can alter the tempos of in real time as well. So, while you get 10 apps free, by slowing them down and speeding them up it gives loads more alternatives. You can record and listen back to analyse it as well. It's billed as 'the ultimate play-along practise app'."

Visit www.drum-ed.com/time-to-play for more.

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Introducing

RINA SUZUKI

Japanese power-pop rocker RINA levels up on SCANDAL's new record

Osaka's SCANDAL was born out of a vocal and dance school where the members met in 2006. The quartet didn't play instruments at the time, so RINA bought herself a drumming book, set about copying her favourite tracks and began writing lyrics for their own songs. Now on their ninth recording, the band have launched a record label in time for their latest album, *Kiss From The Darkness*, packed with their signature blend of high energy J-pop and pop-rock.

What has changed with having your own label?

"By launching our own label, the thing that has changed the most is our mentality. We have been able to make songs with more freedom than ever before, and it feels like we're now also able to think about lots of different things more simply. We're hoping to be able to keep playing at our own pace from now on."

How do you create drum parts?

"It depends on the song. Sometimes I play and record something as a voice memo and I share it; during our sessions at the studio we create an arrangement. MAMI [lead guitar] writes a lot of our songs, and she's a total powerhouse who can arrange each instrumental part and create a complete demo. We often use that as a base, and then each of us creates our own parts."

How did you record *Kiss From The Darkness*?

"On this album there are a lot of songs where we recorded the drums first. For songs like 'Fuzzy' and 'Masterpiece', we wanted to convey more of a raw band sound, so we recorded those together. Most of the time in the studio we are carefully building up the sound. It's during our live shows when we can play with a lot more emotion. There it's not just sound, but the performance itself that's at the forefront for us. But I think that both places allow you to level up as a player."

How do you prepare for touring?

"I have a personal trainer at the gym. I think it's so important to have both physical strength and a positive attitude when you're on stage. When we're touring, the most important thing is to eat and sleep right! I feel like it's during tours when we know our schedule, that I have the best daily routine. We receive a lot of support from our fans coming to our shows, and all the messages we receive on social media afterward."

Is it important for SCANDAL to play outside Japan?

"Ever since we were an indie band, we have performed overseas every single year, and our activities abroad are very important to us. We don't draw a line between Japan and abroad – basically, where we have fans, we'll go! We've been to a lot of different countries now, but it still feels like there are very few girl bands like us around the world. We just want to go to as many places as possible and show everyone how fun girl bands can be."

Out soon: SCANDAL's new single 'Ivory' comes out on 16 June from JPU Records.

David West

Key kit: *Pearl drums, Sabian cymbals, Pearl Signature sticks*

“THESE DRUMS ROCK. THE MOMENT I SAT BEHIND ONE, I FELL IN LOVE WITH THEM.”
JORDAN MACKAY.
THE SNUTS.
NATALDRUMS.COM
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Images: Cameron Brisbane

Introducing

JORDAN MACKAY

This jazz kit-wielding, indie-influenced rocker readies The Snuts' debut

Inspired at the age of four by his drummer dad, Jordan Mackay has since come a mighty long way, having recently released a debut album with his band, The Snuts.

Who were your early drum heroes?
"Matt Helders, Gary Powell and Bernard Purdie. When I play, I try to form my style, but I'm sure if you listened close enough you'd be able to hear those influences."

How did you approach laying down drum tracks for The Snuts' debut album, *W.L.*?
"Most of the drums on this record – apart from some of the sessions with Inflo – were recorded separately instead of the fully fleshed-out part. Snares, kicks, hats and most other components were all recorded on separate tracks for the best chance of post manipulation of sound."

What kind of impact did producer Tony Hoffer have on your playing and tone?
"Without giving away too many of his

secrets, Tony was quite open to new ideas from me as a drummer and let me work pretty freely on the kit that we recorded most of our debut record on. Tony also has some great techniques that he uses to make drums fit any 'genre' without really having to change kits. That can be left to your imagination."

What kit/setup do you use?
"I use what you would call a traditional jazz setup with more cymbals. At the moment I use either my Natal Arcadia acrylic set or Natal Classic maple set. Both amazing kits – the acrylic more in a live setting as it has super punchy toms that cut and can be heard very clearly, and the maple more in a recording setting as it has nice warm tones that are picked up amazingly by good mics. Both kits could do both jobs very easily, though, that is just my personal preference. I also use a full Dune Grand set of Zultan cymbals along with an 18" Zultan Caz crash cymbal."

What is the one piece of gear you couldn't live without?
"My 19" Zultan Dune Trash crash cymbal. It gets used in nearly every song I play – usually for some quirky offbeat accents."

What is coming up in 2021 for you?
"As everyone knows the live music scene has been pretty extinct for the past year, so I'm hopeful to see the return of some events later in the year. Our debut record dropped in early April, so although no live performances for now, it will still be a very exciting year to be a part of, for fans of The Snuts." **Rich Chamberlain**

Key kit: *Natal drums, Zultan cymbals*

Welcome back

Spike T. Smith

MEMORIAM, SESSIONS

Images: Fi Stimpson & James Pepper

From punk legends The Damned to Brit icon Morrissey, Spike T. Smith adds death metal to his repertoire as he joins Memoriam...

How did you connect with Memoriam?

"Frank Healy, the bass player, and I used to be in a band called Sacrilege in the late '80s. Around 2015, American label Relapse Records wanted to do a 30th anniversary box set of the first Sacrilege record, so we got back together to do a couple of new songs for that. In the meantime, Frank and Karl Willetts, who used to be the singer in Bolt Thrower, put together this new band, Memoriam.

"They'd been doing good business and had already done three albums. I got invited to do the album due to Andy Whale, the original drummer, being unable to record. The band had the studio booked and the songs written, but they had a drummer who was unable to play, so Frank got in touch with me knowing that I'm good at learning material quickly."

Death metal is a new style for you?

"When he asked me, I thought, I've never really done full-on death metal. I've got a long history with punk drumming and alternative drumming, indie rock, thrash metal... but death

metal is another subgenre again. You can be a great big band jazz drummer, but that doesn't necessarily mean you're going to be a great bebop drummer. How are my chops going to be for death metal? He sent me some of the tracks, and I was pleasantly surprised. I suppose I was expecting a lot of blastbeats, but to me it sounded more rooted in thrash metal with a slight extremity to the intensity. I thought, okay, there's a meeting point here, this can work."

How did you track the album?

"With the lockdown, when I went to the studio there was nobody from the band there, just me and the producer, Russ Russell. Because the band had a decent label and contract, I did have time. I was fearful of, 'Right, you've got to go in and record this album, and you've only got two days to do 10 songs that you barely know'. But I had a week, so that felt luxurious.

"The dialogue was purely between me and Russ, which worked well because we bonded over some concert toms. I've always loved Neil Peart, and with his sad passing I thought, you know what would be nice, to have some concert toms and have some really indulgent, elaborate drum fills that I can call upon if the moment fits. I was setting up the concert toms, and Russ said, 'Ah, you're going for a bit of a Neil Peart setup?' I was like, 'Yeah, that's exactly what I was thinking. I'm a big fan, are you?' He said, 'Yes!' On the very first song, it has some of these Neil Peart-inspired, right-across-the-toms fills, and he loved them, so that gave me confidence." **David West**

Out Now: *In The End* by Memoriam is out now from Reaper Entertainment.

Key kit: *Pearl drums, Zildjian cymbals and sticks, Remo drumheads, Protection Racket cases*

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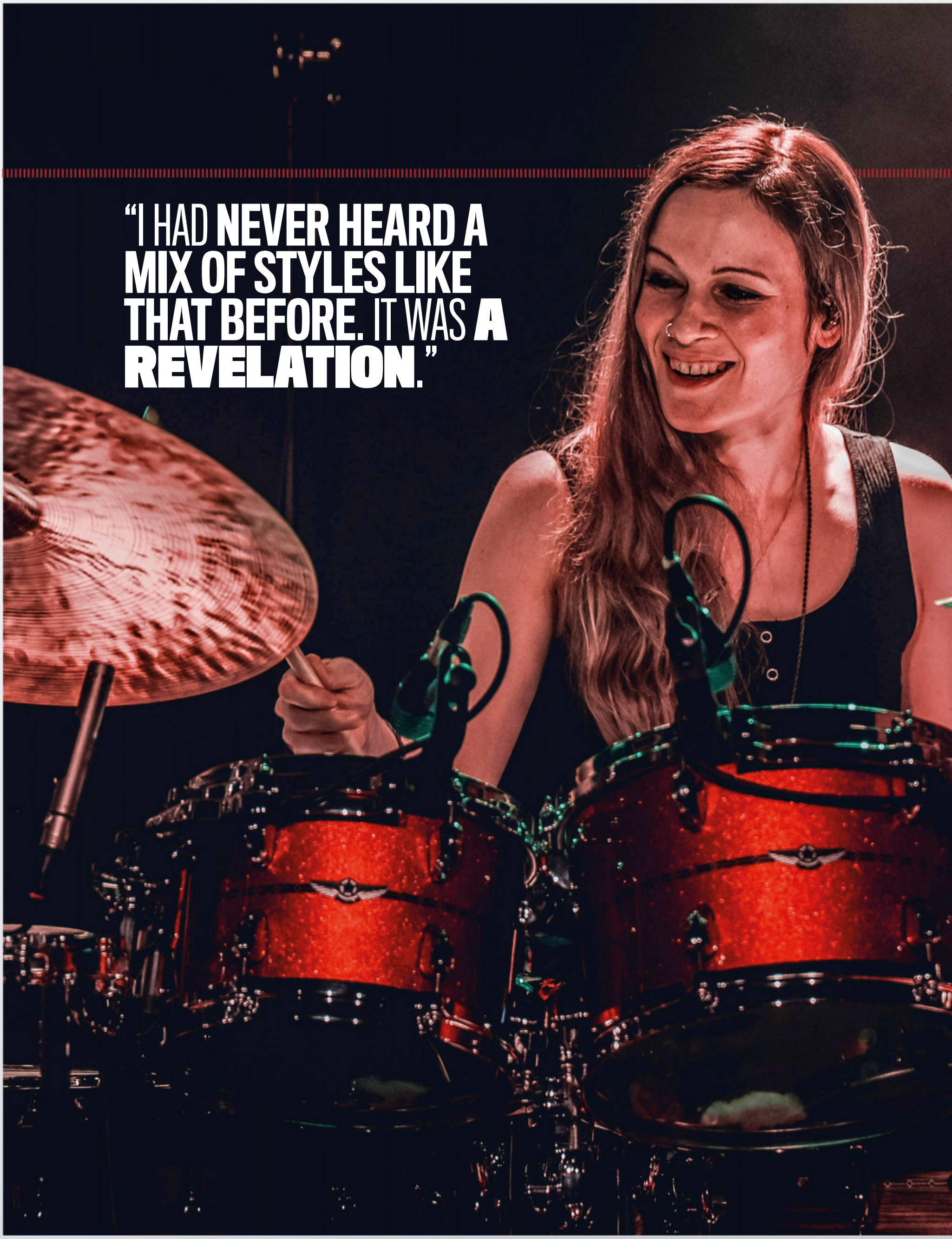
1. Entrants must be aged 18 or over and reside in the UK. 2. Entries close 11.59pm GMT on 30 June 2021. 3. Prize is as stated and is non-transferable and non-refundable. 4. There is no cash alternative. 5. Only one entry per person. 6. There will be one winner. 7. Winner will be notified by email 14 days after the competition closes. For full terms and conditions email info@beatsnetwork.co.uk Promoter: Beats Holdings Ltd, Repton Manor, Repton Avenue, Ashford, Kent, TN23 3GP


"I HAD NEVER HEARD A MIX OF STYLES LIKE THAT BEFORE. IT WAS A REVELATION."

Anika Nilles

'Überjam'
John Scofield – *Überjam* (2002)
Drummer: Adam Deitch

"John Scofield's album *Überjam* had a huge influence on my playing and really opened up my interest and mindset for fusion music – particularly the title track, which immediately had me hooked!

"I first stumbled across the album at a local music store back in 2006 and it blew me away. I listened to it on repeat. At that time, I was really into Stanton Moore's playing, and what I was hearing on the track 'Überjam' was a similar kind of drumming style, but in a completely different context. All the different elements are so well balanced, and I had never heard a mix of styles like that before. It was a revelation.

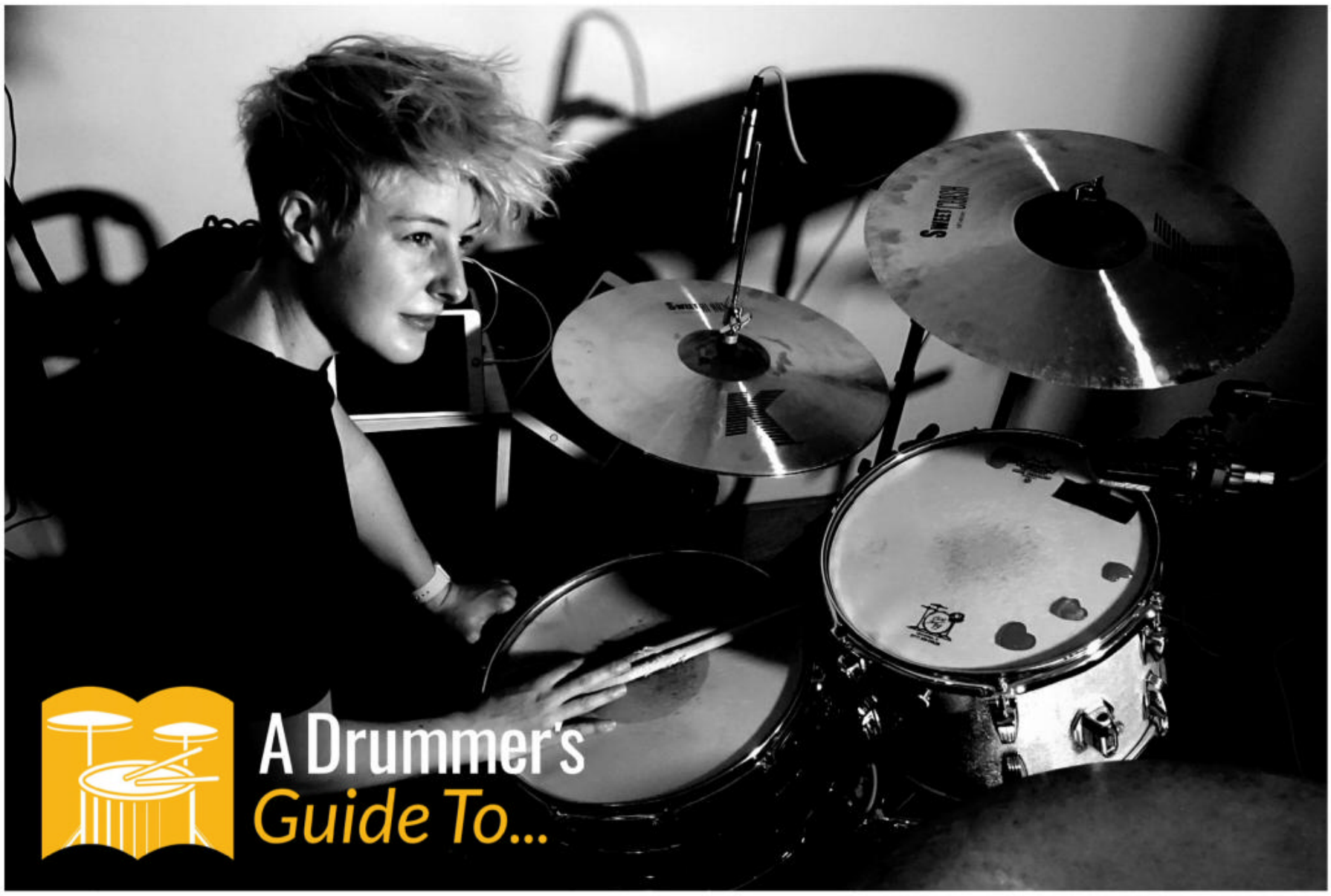
"The drummer on 'Überjam' is Adam Deitch, and he brought a hip-hop vibe and New Orleans' feel to the track all at the same time. He melded in with the rest of the band so well and in such a fresh way. I loved his attitude, the balance of those funky and groovy vibes and how he incorporated those elements of hip-hop with the electronic sounds.

"My background is rock, and at that time I hadn't worked much with electronic sounds, so it was really interesting to listen to those parts and be inspired to start exploring and working with electronic and percussion sounds around my own acoustic setup. When I look back now, that was a really important moment for me as a drummer.

"This track is such a journey! It has several break-downs and build-up parts, and there is this very funky section towards the middle that showcases some of the hip-hop influences. You can hear the different snare sounds – I couldn't say if they are real snares or samples – but it is just *so* cool, and it encouraged me to start fooling around with several snare sounds on my own kit. In the middle of the song things start to get a bit wilder, and there is this very familiar rock attitude on the drums as Adam and John collaborate together so beautifully. By the end, the spotlight is shining on a wild Adam Deitch who is simply smashing everything out!

"The mix of jazz, funk, hip-hop, R&B, soul and rock that I encountered on *Überjam* was so new to me, and it made me dive into and explore more records in that style. I developed a strong interest in fusion music because of this album and this particular track, and when I look at where I am today I can see that it definitely opened new doors for me in so many different ways." R

Images: Vincent Priebe



Images: Emily Dolan Davies

BECOMING THE PLAYER YOU DREAM OF

Emily Dolan Davies on the importance of listening to yourself play

We all have drummers we admire and look up to. For me, in my mid to late teens, I found myself gravitating towards groove players such as James Gadson, Steve Jordan, Earl Palmer and Steve Gadd and dreaming about one day being able to embody just a small percentage of their wonderful grooves!

In my head, it seemed simple – play along to their records and by default, I should take on at least some of their characteristics. However, in reality I didn't see much change in how I played or, more importantly, how I felt when I played. The chasm between how I sounded and how I wanted to sound felt as big as the Grand Canyon!

The turning point for me came in a lesson with an incredible drummer called Billy Ward which changed my life. He told me that if I truly wanted to progress in the direction of my dreams, then I should be recording myself and listening back to get a true representation of my playing.

I politely listened whilst thinking, 'I already know how I sound'... But I obliged, got a dictaphone and got to work.

I decided to start with a groove I was comfortable with, played to a click. I recorded, rewound the tape and as I listened back, I was shocked! Was this how I actually sounded? It was lumpy, stiff and just awful! In all honesty, I felt ashamed. It was the furthest point from how I thought I sounded, let alone how I *wanted* to sound. I was devastated.

From that moment on, I vowed to record and listen back to everything I did – practising drum exercises, playing to records, rehearsals with bands, live gigs, the lot! That little dictaphone may as well have been fused to my body.

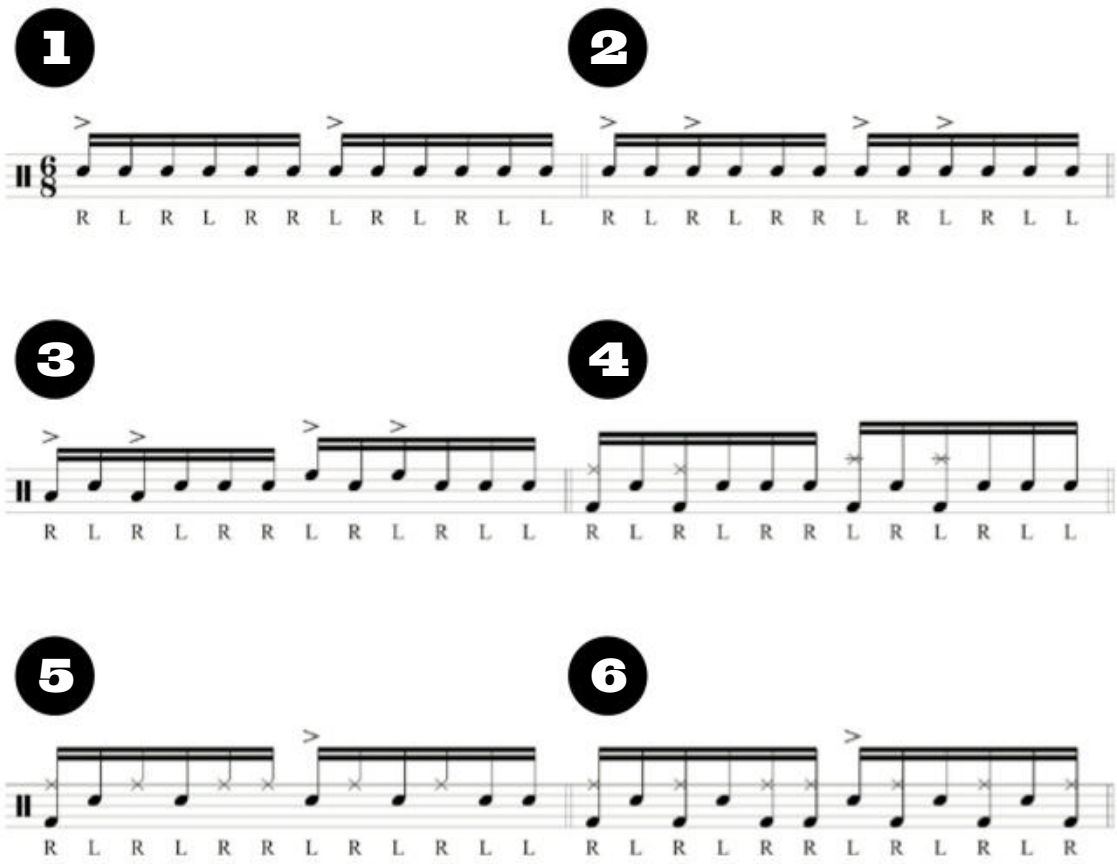
Little by little, the cringe-factor lessened, and my understanding of pocket, listening to others, locking in – and how it all related to me and my playing – improved. The gap between how I thought I sounded and how I actually sounded slowly disappeared and continued to, as the groove I had hankered after all those years began to emerge.

This one piece of advice changed my life. It applies to any type of drumming – groove, technical, chops – and if you want to go the extra mile that most don't, then get honest, accurate feedback that you can build upon. Record yourself and listen back.

www.EmilyDrums.com
www.EmilyDolanDavies.com

Rudiment Of The Month

Double Paradiddle



A double paradiddle is the longer six-note variant of the single paradiddle. Sometimes referred to as a para-paradiddle, it's the single-stroke element of the paradiddle, which has been doubled to give us R L R L R R, L R L R L L.

Occasionally, the double paradiddle is confused with its other relative, the paradiddle-diddle (R L R R L L) – but as well as being a different sticking, the stand-out difference is that the double paradiddle will switch from hand to hand as it repeats, whereas the paradiddle-diddle will remain in the hand it starts in, whether that's left or right.

The basic figure is most commonly played either by accenting the first note of each group of six (Ex 1) or the first and third notes (Ex 2). Once comfortable with the sticking, you can try moving the accented notes to the toms (Ex 3) or the cymbals (Ex 4).

In Ex 5, the sticking is used to play a groove by placing the right hand on the ride cymbal and keeping the left on the snare. And if we switch the final note of the second group of six, it becomes an Afro-Cuban 6/8 or Bembe pattern.

This can sound very effective if, as is seen here (Ex 6), the bass drum follows all of the notes played in the right hand.

OFFBEATS

RALPH PETERSON RIP

Ralph Peterson has passed away at the age of 58 after a six-year battle with cancer. The jazz titan died at his US home on March 1st. Peterson came to the attention of many in 1983 when he joined Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. He became a band leader in 1998 and remained actively recording right up until last year's *Onward And Upward*.

FLOYD AT KNEBWORTH

If you're topping a bill that includes Paul McCartney, Robert Plant and Jimmy Page and Genesis, you'd better put on one hell of a show. That's exactly what Pink Floyd did at Knebworth in 1990, and now you can hear this stunning set for yourself with a new release. It certainly gets Nick Mason's seal of approval: "There is something special about Knebworth," Nick said. "We all still have fond memories of playing there in the '70s, and this show was no different."

STOP PRESS!

The 2021 Drumathon is on! Created by Errol Kennedy and Bev Sage, the 2021 event will be starting on May 15th at 10am and won't end until 10pm on the 22nd. 30 drummers drumming nonstop – a total of 264 hours! – to raise much-needed funds for mental health charities in the UK. Drummers signed up include Roger Taylor (Duran Duran), Jon Beavis (IDLES), Cherisse Osei (Simple Minds), Derrick McKenzie (Jamiroquai) and many more! Go to https://drumathon.live to donate or find out more.

SORUM BOOK NEARS

Matt Sorum's much-delayed autobiography is finally set to hit the shelves this autumn. The not-so-snappily titled *Double Talkin' Jive: True Rock 'N' Roll Stories From The Drummer Of Guns N' Roses, The Cult, And Velvet Revolver* was originally due for an April 2020 release but will now be available from September.

FIRST LOOK

SHINY NEW DRUM STUFF TO LUST AFTER

1: Eargasm In-Ear Headphones
Price: From $699 (£508)
With four versions available, these in-ears can be customised using Eargasm's 3D configurator. The company claims to make ear impressions obsolete with its new Ear Scanner app. Face ID-enabled iPhone users simply scan their ears and place an order..
www.eargasm.com

2: Ebenor Percussion: Noranda Copper Collection
Price: £867
In Québec, Canada, William Leclerc has been building handmade drums since 2014. The latest masterpiece to come from Ebenor Percussion is the 14"x6½" Noranda Copper. Its 1/16" (1.5mm) shell is finished with a wonderfully unique patina, making every drum one of a kind.
www.ebenorpercussion.com

3: Zultan Sticks
Price: From £6.20
The new line of German-produced sticks, brushes and mallets from Zultan Cymbals includes a whopping 14 models. The collection ranges from Hickory 7A, 5A, 55A, 5B, 2B, 5AX, 5BX and Jazz to nylon brushes and bamboo rods. The sticks are finished with three natural, sustainably produced oils and waxes.
www.zultancymbals.com

4: Pearl President Series Drum Kits
Price: £1,569
As part of a host of new gear released in celebration of its 75th anniversary, Pearl goes back to its roots with an update on the classic President Series kits. Available in two shell recipes: Phenolic and Deluxe. Pictured here is the Deluxe in the stunning Ocean Ripple finish.
www.pearldrums.com

5: Haynes Drum-Kit Manual
Price: £20.54
The Haynes Drum-Kit Manual contains everything from buying the right kit to improving its performance. Written by the award-winning Paul Balmer, the manual features iconic case studies, including Gene Krupa's Radio King and Steve Jordan's Signature Yamaha Cocktail kit.
www.musiconearth.co.uk

6: DW MFG Pedals Extended Footboard Models
Price: From £630
Drum Workshop's Machined Pedal range is now available with an extended footboard option. The aircraft-grade aluminium pedals can be bought as both chain drive (MCD) and direct drive (MDD) bass drum pedals in addition to hi-hat stands.
www.dwdrums.com

7: Percussion Plus Slap Djembes
Price: From £20
Perfect for beginner percussionists, these colourful slap djembes feature instructions printed on the playing surface. Available in pre-tuned 6", 8", 10" and 12" models or rope-tuned 8", 10" and 12" models.
www.percussionplus.co.uk

PEARL
PEARL

4

5

Haynes
Drum-Kit
Manual
How to buy, set up and maintain your drum-kit
Haynes
Paul Balmer

6

PERCUSSION Plus
BASS
SLAP
TONE
PERCUSSION Plus

7

PREMIER '51' DRUM KIT

This post-war Premier kit defined the look that made British designed and built Premier internationally recognisable and desirable

Words: **Geoff Nicholls** | Images: **James Cumpsty**

In 1940 the UK's Premier Drum Company was bombed out of London and relocated north to Leicester in order to continue its vital war work. This work required a step up in engineering precision and expertise in die-casting, that in turn enabled Premier to emerge by the '50s as arguably the most advanced drum company in the world.

A bold claim perhaps, but just look at this 70-year-old kit with its thickly chromed die-cast hardware, which includes the rims/hoops, the defining art deco lugs and flush base stands.

We have owner Will Keel-Stocker once more to thank for preserving and cherishing this outstanding kit. He explains how it was produced in a time of continual improvements, but also during an austere period in our history when nothing was wasted. And since Premier forged almost everything in-house, kits were sometimes amalgamations of quickly evolving designs.

Will reveals, "The 12"x8" tom and 14"x5½" snare have the facelift, slim-line lugs that were new around 1951 with brass-threaded inserts, while the two floor toms and bass drum have the earlier chunkier design with threads directly tapped into the zinc castings.

"Bass drum claws are the first version – pot metal and notorious for cracking under tension – but have the L-shaped 'single-lever' tension rods that replaced the earlier 'T' rods and were a Premier staple until the mid-to-late '60s.

"Shells are all pre-international diameters, with the bass drum in particular a rather curious metric: 56cm, roughly 21½". As this kit pre-dates the invention of the plastic drum head, it has calf skin heads made to measure.

"Typical of the immediate post-war years, both floor toms have very deep 18" shells, which certainly makes the 14" diameter one look extremely distinctive. It's also undrilled for legs, mounted instead in a folding basket that is not particularly successful at providing a secure playing surface.

"The larger 16" tom does have leg brackets, a factory option at the time. The 12" tom is mounted on the undrilled bass drum via a hoop clamp, as are the bass drum spurs."

Coming finally to the snare, here is further evidence of Premier's urgent quest for improvements during this emerging period. "It's a hybrid," Will says, "with its own unique parallel-action snare mechanism, a precursor to the Ace family. It's an improvement on the original Premier and Premier No.2 snares, but it would take until the '60's Royal Ace to design a truly robust and adjustable parallel mechanism. This one is clunky and difficult to tension for a consistently good tone.

"Interestingly, the snare shell has a factory-painted white interior that I have never before seen on a Premier drum. Its original super-slunk calf snare-side head has, amazingly, survived intact."

DEEP FLOOR TOMS
Both floor toms were catalogued as 20" deep, although in reality, 18". They also have the early, directly tapped and chunkier single-ended lugs.

1. CURVACIOUS LUGS
Both floor toms have the first generation of directly tapped lug brackets, which lack the usual brass swivel nut inserts.

2. FLOOR TOM STAND
The extremely rare 14"x20" tom is mounted on this well-crafted, if somewhat unstable, floor stand. Note also the calf skin head.

3. HYBRID SNARE DRUM
Preceding the Ace and Royal Ace lines, this apparently one-off snare has a unique design parallel snare mechanism and unheard-of factory-painted white interior.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH:
SIMON JOHN'S VINTAGE DRUM SHOW
www.vintagedrums.co.uk

WHITE PEARL WRAP

Will Keel-Stocker says, "Typical of this hatched white pearl finish, it has yellowed to a delightful butterscotch colour. It would have been brilliant white in 1951".

FLAT-BASED STANDS

Another show-stopping aspect of Premier's new image was the rock-solid flush-based stands with their die-cast fold-out legs.

"PREMIER'S 1946 POST-WAR RELAUNCH SAW **THE INTRODUCTION OF FLUSH BRACING LUGS,** A LOOK THAT PREMIER WOULD RETAIN IN VARIOUS GUISES **INTO THE LATE '80S.**"

OWNER, WILLIAM KEEL-STOCKER

NEED TO KNOW

POST-WAR PREMIER
Premier's revolutionary look after 1946 was a complete change from the '30s with the richly chromed die-cast hardware leading the world in quality.

RED PREMIER BADGES
The first version of the famous 'Red P' block logo enamelled badge seen here was replaced in 1952 with the short-lived (and highly collectable) script badge.

WILL KEEL-STOCKER
Will has several projects on the go, playing his superb collection of UK vintage drums. See some of them here: www.vintagedrummer.co.uk

Images: Courtesy of Regal Tip

Regal Tip Founder Joe Calato Turns 100

A TRIBUTE TO A QUIET PIONEER

Words: **Rick Van Horn**

March 20th marked a singular occasion: the 100th birthday of Joe Calato. And while anyone turning 100 is a remarkable achievement in itself, it's all the more so because of who Joe is: an innovator who can rightly stand as the last of the genuine pioneers of the percussion industry.

Some drummers may not recognise Joe's name, but it's very likely that they're familiar with his accomplishments. For it was this quiet, unassuming man – himself a lifelong drummer – who revolutionised drumstick design by inventing the nylon tip. And while he was at it, Joe also established the independent drumstick industry.

In the Beginning

Joe Calato grew up in Niagara Falls, New York, and took up the drums at the age of eight. When he was 13, the American congress repealed the prohibition of alcohol that had been in place since 1920. Saloons immediately opened and they wanted music. "I started playing and making money," Joe recalls. "I never wanted to be a great drumming technician, I just wanted to play music and keep good time."

Joe's early drumming career was interrupted by a two-year stint in the US Army Air Corps during World War II, flying over Europe as a navigator in a B-17 Flying Fortress. When the war ended, he returned to Niagara Falls and started playing again.

In the late '40s there were no drumstick companies. Sticks were made and sold by the drum companies, almost as an afterthought. "I couldn't believe how bad those sticks were," says Joe. "I'd been woodworking since I was about eight years old, and I figured that I could make better sticks than the ones I was buying. So I started turning sticks for myself and for other drummers around town.

"That's about the time that drummers started keeping time more on their ride cymbals," Joe continues. "Playing on ride cymbals caused the wooden tips to wear down and chip. I couldn't afford to buy new sticks all the time because I'd started a family by then."

Necessity being the mother of invention, Joe started (as he puts it) 'fooling around' with ideas for improving the tips. "I cut a chunk of plastic out of a screwdriver handle," he says. "Then I whittled a tip and fitted it onto a drumstick. It didn't stay on very well, but it worked. I knew that I had something. After that I kept experimenting in my cellar – sometimes till 2:00 in the morning. The hours meant nothing to me; I just wanted to get this idea perfected."

Pounding the Pavement

After developing his sticks at home, Joe took them to the New York City drum shop of legendary drum teacher Henry Adler. "I brought sticks that had my tips and that I had matched in pairs for weight," Joe recalls. "Nobody had ever done that before. Drummers would usually just grab a bunch of loose sticks and make do with those. Henry told me, 'A lot of drummers go through here. Lay your sticks out on the counter and let those drummers check 'em out'."

Not long after he got back from New York, Joe got an order from Henry Adler for a hundred pairs of sticks. "I almost passed out," says Joe, laughing. "Then I went down into the basement and started producing drumsticks in earnest – making the sticks and the tips, both still by hand. This was about 1958."

Those first hundred sticks sold in a hurry. Drummers quickly realised that nylon tips would be more durable than wood tips, and thus would make their sticks last longer. Some also liked the brighter sound that the nylon tips produced on a ride cymbal. Since the focus of Joe's sticks was on their unique tip, he gave them the brand name of Regal Tip.

The first pro drummer to get involved with Joe's sticks was Jake Hanna, who played with the Woody Herman band. "When the band came through Buffalo," Joe says, "I went to see Jake and showed him the sticks. He, in turn, started showing them to everyone he could. This led to my getting letters from people all over the world asking for them."

One of those letters came from Maury Lishon, owner of Frank's Drum Shop in Chicago – one of the largest and most influential retailers in America at that time. Soon after, the sticks were in other major drum shops, like Bob Yeager's Hollywood Drum Shop, Mo Mahoney's shop in Las Vegas, and Frank Ippolito's in New York City. "I favoured the drum shops over general music stores," says Joe, "because I was interested in improving things for drummers."

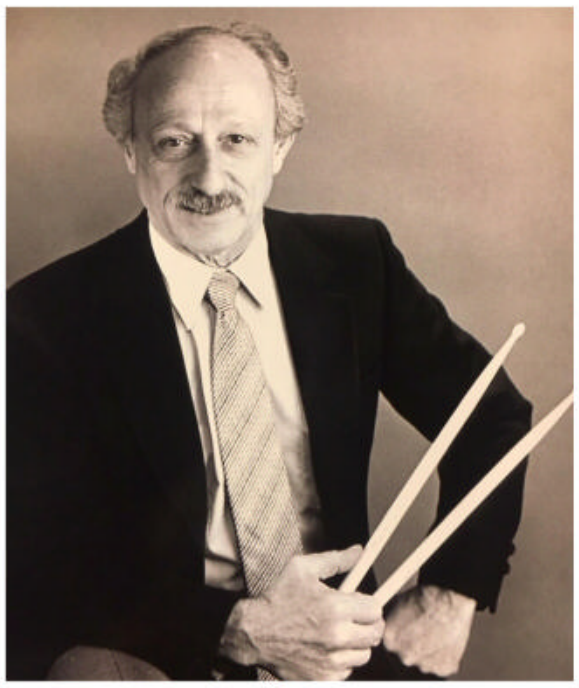
Establishing a Business *and* an Industry

The early success of Joe's sticks led him to a life-changing decision. He'd been operating a cabinet-making business for 15 years, but when he saw a future in making drumsticks, he converted that business into a drumstick factory. In doing so, he established the very concept of an independent drumstick manufacturer.

"I knew what a drumstick should be," Joe says. "This was the beginning of turning the industry around, in terms of the quality of the tools that drummers used for playing."

In addition to how best to create a drumstick, Joe had equally strong feelings about how to finish it – which he believed would be to dip it in lacquer. When he discovered that no one made a machine for that purpose, he designed one himself. It runs the sticks tip-down through a lacquer bath and then through a drying process. As the lacquer runs down the shaft of the stick it gets heavier where it's most needed: at the neck and the tip. This provides a finish that's unique to Regal Tip sticks.

Another distinctive aspect to the design of Regal Tip sticks has to do with Joe's preference as a drummer himself. "I always liked having a thinner neck," he explains, "because it gave the stick more rebound. Joe Morello loved our 5A – and he was famous for his hand speed. Of course, as rock 'n' roll came in, we had to add models with shorter tapers and heavier necks, just to offer sticks for everyone."



Joe Calato as a new entrepreneur, shown with his revolutionary nylon-tipped drumsticks.

It's not surprising that the success of Joe's nylon-tipped sticks quickly led to similar models being offered by other drumstick brands. But those others had problems with the tips coming off or cracking. Joe has never revealed how he kept the tips on, but he is willing to explain why his tips didn't crack: "When the rest of the industry got involved," he reveals, "they started molding the tips. That's the wrong way to do it. Regal Tip uses extruded nylon. It's like the difference between cast iron and steel. Cast iron will chip and crack; steel won't because of its elongated molecular structure."

Revolutionising Tips... Again!

In 1958, Joe revolutionised drumsticks with the introduction of the nylon tip. In 1982, he did it again with the development of the E-Tip. In essence, it was a standard nylon tip, into which small grooves were cut. This removed some of the mass and at the same time made the tips a little more 'giving' on impact.

Says Joe, "There have always been purist drummers who think they can only get the sound they want from

ARTIST & INDUSTRY TRIBUTES

CLAYTON CAMERON (Sammy Davis Jr., Tony Bennett, brush specialist)
"Joe Calato is all about the love of playing drums. When I visited the Calato factory to talk about creating a new brush model, Joe's love for the design process – and what he could do for drummers – was so impressive. That love is infectious, and it makes anyone around him want to play drums!"

WALFREDO REYES, JR. (Chicago, Steve Winwood)
"I'd like to offer Joe huge happy birthday wishes! As one of drumming's innovators, he is drum history.

"When I was growing up, every great drummer I saw had a pair of Regal Tip nylon-tip drumsticks and Regal Tip brushes. Many years later, when I joined the Regal Tip family as an endorser, I was honored to visit Joe at his home. He asked me about my drumming needs, and his eyes lit up when we spoke about drumming and how to be better at it. His spirit of adventure and innovation was so passionately present.

"I remember telling Joe that when I had gigs that demanded very soft playing, I took the tips off a pair of Regal Tip sticks, and they became the softest sounding sticks ever! He said, 'Yeah, when I used to send sticks to Jake Hanna back in the day, he used them with tips on and without tips'. Just when I thought I'd invented something, I learned that the masters had been there and done that!"

JEFF HAMILTON (Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra, Diana Krall)
"Congrats on a wonderful 100 years of productivity, innovation, dignity, compassion and creativity. So many drummers have been grateful for all you've done, and so many musicians have appreciated your gifts to the industry. The drummers sound better with products you have supplied them with. Thank you, Joe. You are truly a pioneer. I'd love to sit down to a plate of pasta and a glass of red wine with you again. We could tell Jake Hanna stories all night!"

JACK GAVIN (Tracy Lawrence, Charlie Daniels Band)
"I started playing with Regal Tip drumsticks by chance, but I quickly fell in love with the way they felt in my hands: the balance, those killer tips and the best lacquer finish in the business. Nothing is comparable. And the reason the sticks are the way they are is because of Joe Calato's dedication to innovation and quality. But above all that, Joe is a sweetheart of a man. His kindness and generosity are unparalleled. I'm lucky to call him a mentor and a friend."

JOE FRANCO (Good Rats, Twisted Sister, *Double Bass Drumming* author)
"I remember the time I visited the Regal Tip factory in the late '70s. Joe greeted me with, 'You come here for my sticks or my daughters?'"

JOHN DECHRISTOPHER (Artist Rep for Steve Gadd, Peter Erskine, Rick Marotta and Danny Seraphine; former Zildjian VP of Artist Relations)
"I know I speak for drummers in every corner of the world when I say, 'Thank you' for your groundbreaking contributions to drumming. My first pair of drumsticks were Regal Tip Rock models, purchased in 1972 with my paper route money. All these years later, it's a great honor to know you and the entire Calato Family – true drum industry royalty. So now I raise a glass of Italian wine and join the rest of the

a wood tip. But they're sacrificing durability. The E-Tip provides that durability, but it also produces the warm, mellow sound of wood. When we introduced the E-Tip at a NAMM show, I showed it to one of my competitors – who was also a very good friend. He said, 'Now why didn't I invent that?' And I said, 'Because you're not Joe Calato'."

A Focus on Brushes

As Joe's nylon-tip sticks grew in popularity, he turned his attention to another drumming tool: brushes.

"I always loved playing with brushes," he says, "and, like with sticks, it was hard to find good ones. So I thought about things that would make a good brush and how I could put all of those things into a new model. I used molded rubber handles and a little heavier-gauge aluminum than what had been used before. I also designed a way to keep the wires from being pulled all the way into the handle when retracted. This keeps them from getting snagged and bent when they're pushed forward again." Eventually, Joe came up with what is now the Regal Tip 583R model – one of the world's most popular brush models.

Just as with sticks, balance is important in a brush. For example, the classic wood-handled 550W model has a smaller-diameter handle than those of many other brands. "I wanted to keep the feel of the retractable model," says Joe. "I could easily have just used a drumstick shank for the 550W, but I didn't want it to be handle-heavy. So I designed a smaller-diameter handle just for that brush. It was an extra manufacturing step, but it made all the difference to the playing feel."

It should come as no surprise that Regal Tip was the first brand to offer a hybrid stick/brush. This was the original Blastick, which Joe developed in conjunction with its inventor, Andy Phreaner. Upon their introduction in the late '70s, Blasticks instantly became popular for situations where sticks were too loud or sharp, but wire brushes were too soft. In particular, they became a mainstay in the Nashville studios, producing the 'train beat' heard on hundreds of country music hits.

Keeping It in the Family

Joe Calato dedicated his entire adult life to the creation and operation of the Regal Tip Company and to the improvement of tools used by drummers. In 2001, the Percussive Arts Society saluted his achievements by inducting him into the PAS Hall Of Fame. And in the summer of 2015, Joe was honoured by the United States Congress with a resolution in the Congressional Record, citing his commitment to the music industry and to the economy of the Niagara Falls area.

Joe only began to slow down a few years ago – he played his last gig at the age of 93! Today, as a centenarian, he's enjoying a quiet retirement. His daughter Carol started with the company in 1973 and serves as its president. Joe's younger daughter, Cathy, oversees Calato's distribution. Her daughter Michelle joined the firm as inside sales and artist relations manager several years ago and takes a leading role today. Michelle's children started as interns during their summer vacations from high school. "Today, I've got great-grandchildren working at Regal Tip," says Joe. "That's what I call a family business."

world as we celebrate your 100th birthday, and wish you many more. God bless you, Sir."

DANIEL DE LOS REYES
(Zac Brown Band; Earth, Wind & Fire)
"When I was in school, hanging out with fellow drummers, we'd go to the music store to see what was the latest and greatest in equipment. Every time I'd roll Regal Tip sticks on the counter, they were always flawless – and they sounded great on cymbals.

"When I moved to Los Angeles and got the opportunity to join the Regal Tip family as an endorser, it was an honor for me. Then, while touring, I went to the factory in Niagara Falls, New York and finally met him in person. I'll never forget how kind, generous and full of incredible information he was – about sticks and about drumming history. Thank you, Joe, for being an inspiration to me and to everyone in the drumming community."

RICK MAROTTA
(Studio drummer with Steely Dan, John Lennon, James Taylor and more)
"I've been playing Regal Tip sticks for almost as long as I've been playing the drums. But forget about the sticks. It's about the Man, the Family and the Company – all built on the creativity and integrity of Joe Calato. Happy birthday, Joe. You're an inspiration to the industry and to the rest of us who've gotten to know, admire and respect you over the years."

Joe Calato in 2015, surrounded by the sticks he pioneered.

CRAIGIE ZILDJIAN (Executive Chair, Avedis Zildjian Cymbal Company)
"The Zildjian family has always felt an affinity towards the Calatos because there are a lot of similarities between us. For one thing, we just celebrated my late father Armand's 100th birthday. And, of course, we're both family businesses in percussion. Beyond that, Joe had two daughters in the business and so did Armand – maybe that's one of the secrets to our mutual success?"

CAROL CALATO (Joe's daughter and president of Regal Tip)
"Even at 100 years old, my father embodies the dictum that 'once a drummer, always a drummer'. That was reinforced on the day before his birthday, when he was visited by a woman named Rose Carella who had sung with his bands over the years. At their visit, Rose started talking about my father's 'feel' when he played drums. She related how she once told him, 'Joe, when you play drums, I don't know if I should sing...or strip'."

Drumlines

Stu Warmington's focus this issue is on the fantastic work done by Brian Calhoun for children and adults with additional needs

Images: Courtesy of Brian Calhoun Drums

As we leave the Windy City behind, we're staying in the USA but heading East to the Big Apple. We're now about to interview the first person I thought about when I was asked to bring back this marching series. Brian Calhoun has achieved so much for other people, which is why I think all our readers should know a bit more about him and what he's done for children and adults with additional needs in the drum corps world.

Brian is a professional drummer, percussion educator, advisor and consultant. He has an extensive background in drum-set, marching and concert percussion. Brian currently owns and runs his own business, Brian Calhoun Drums, where he teaches virtual drum lessons and music classes to people of all ages, levels and abilities, throughout the US and internationally.

Brian was the senior music specialist from April 2009 to June 2020 at the Family Residences and Essential Enterprises, Inc. (FREE) in Old Bethpage, New York before he founded the FREE Players Drum & Bugle Corps in 2010. He wanted to create an opportunity for people of all abilities to share their passion to perform and play instruments. He has also assisted other additional needs groups by working with their respective directors as an advisor and consultant, including Inspiration Drumline and A Plus Drumline from England, Morgantown Stars and Cornerstone Thunder Drumline from the United States – and another drum corps project currently under development in Japan. (*Interesting fact – Nev Latimer who started up the 'Inspiration Drumline' used to be in the Reserve Army with Stu prior to him joining the Royal Marines Corps of Drums in the late '90s.*)

Brian has also been credited numerous times for his work with the FREE Players Drum & Bugle Corps as one of the main inspirations for the creation of various additional needs groups/projects throughout the United States, Asia, South America and Europe.

When he started the corps, it had five members with sticks, pads and a dream of one day marching in a parade. Over the course of his 11½-year tenure at FREE, Brian helped teach over 200 people music and had over 100 people join FREE, where he also served as the Corps Director from Feb 2010 until June 2020.

Image: Drum Corps International

At what age did you start drumming and how did you get into it?

"I started drumming at nine years old and have been playing for over 30 years and teaching for over 20 years. It was my dream to one day play drums and tour with a famous rock or metal band from as early as three years old. In my formative years, I played with my school concert band, orchestra, jazz band and marching band.

"In my 20s I would record, perform and tour with various bands throughout several genres of music, most notably hardcore/metal band Year Of Confession. Throughout my 30-plus years of drumming, I have taken private drum lessons from several local instructors from Long

Image: Drum Corps International

Island, NY. I'm currently studying with drumming's global ambassador Dom Famularo and world-renown marching percussionist Bill Bachman, and I am formally studying drums at Berklee College of Music online. I believe a good teacher never stops being a student, there is always room to grow!"

Biggest drumming influence?
"Without a doubt that would have to be Mike Portnoy."

What made you want to set up FREE?
"I believe people should be able to share their passion with the world, so I thought I could be creating something that would allow this to happen."

Which other drum corps would you most like to play with?
"The Blue Devils. Scott Johnson was incredibly supportive of my work with the FREE Players Drum & Bugle Corps. We were introduced through our mutual friend John Oddo (World Drum Corps Hall of Fame). I have a tremendous amount of respect for Scott and the amazing Blue Devils organisation.

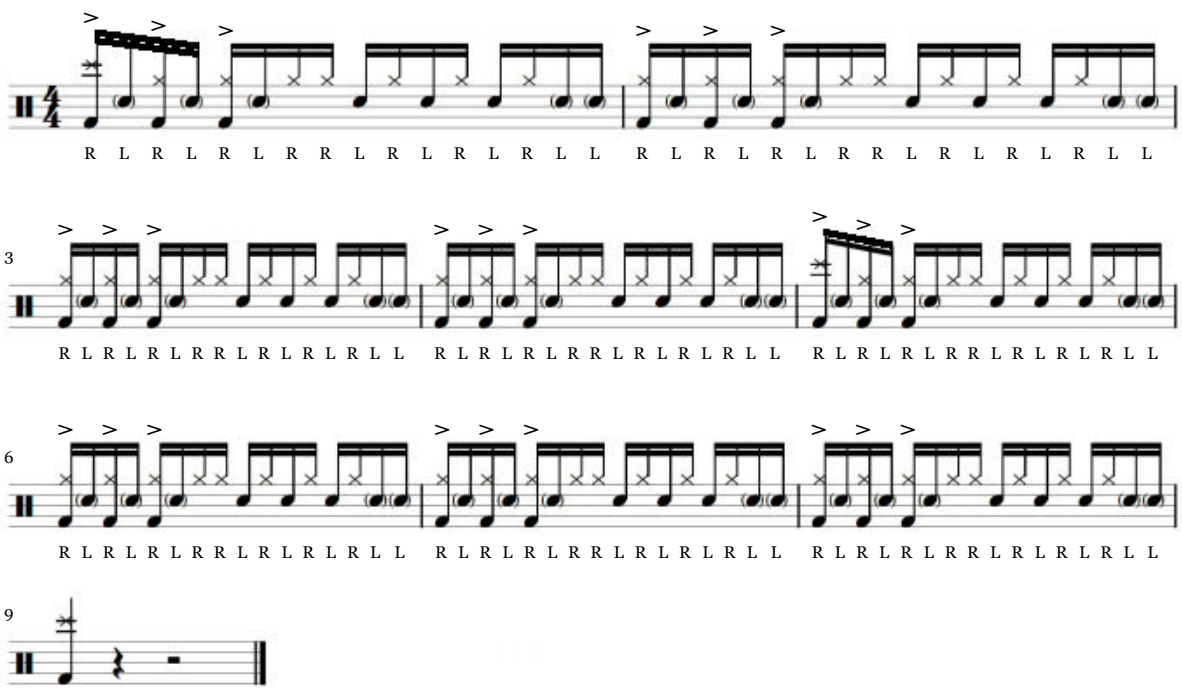
What is your proudest drumming moment to date?
"When the FREE Players Drumline (Viper Flam) won a division championship by defeating two groups without disabilities in legitimate competition at PASIC19 Drumline Battle. We went on to compete for the PASIC Championship against Indiana University and came very close to winning the entire competition." (*Stu was one of the judges for that event. Sorry Brian!*)

What is your most embarrassing moment?
"When I almost accidentally fell off my podium at the WGI Percussion Championships in 2014 in front of 14,000 people."

What has been your most memorable gig and why?
"The 2018 Drum Corps International World Championships. The build up to DCI was over two years long, and I was featured on every major news station across the US. 20,000 spectators at Lucas Oil Stadium, the biggest event in the world for the marching arts, and FREE Players Drum & Bugle Corps made history as the first additional needs group to ever perform.

COFFEE BREAK CHALLENGE

Calhoun Drum Academy Paradiddle Cadence



For Brian's video go to www.youtube.com/c/RhythmMagazine

Image: Nev Latimer/Inspiration Drumline

KEY KIT:

FREE's kit includes: Mapex Quantum Agility snares, Mapex Qualifier tenors, ErgoSonic Marching bass drums, Mapex Armory drum-set, Majestic percussion (marimba, vibraphone, timpani), Sabian cymbals, Evans drumheads, Promark sticks

Brian's personal setup includes: Vater sticks, Tama Starclassic maple drums, Tama Roadpro hardware, Tama Speed Cobra double bass pedal, Zildjian cymbals, Remo drumheads, Gibralter rack

"We had over 80 performers that night in Drumline, Front Ensemble, Color Guard, Brass and Drum Major. Our performance that night was magic and our best ever. The crowd chanted our name in two waves throughout the stadium afterwards. The video of our performance has since gone viral, receiving 5.4 million views on Facebook.

"On a personal note, only a few months before DCI, my first child was born and one week after returning from DCI, my wife and I purchased our first house. 2018 and DCI was like a movie whirlwind."

How has COVID-19 affected your job?

"My job as Senior Music Specialist and Director of the FREE Players Drum & Bugle Corps was eliminated in June 2020 due to Covid cut backs. It was heart-breaking because 2020 was supposed to be our 10-year anniversary. I had so many exciting events planned for the FREE Drum Corps and was on excellent terms with FREE prior to the pandemic. I am very proud of my legacy with the FREE Players Drum & Bugle Corps and wish them nothing but the best.

"I have since started my own business teaching private drum lessons and music classes virtually to students of all ages, levels and abilities. I teach drum-set, marching percussion and concert percussion.

"To coincide with starting my own business, Brian Calhoun Drums, I have begun to film new content for Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Twitter, including drum lessons, drum covers, original music and so much more! I am also working on livestreaming weekly drum lessons and performances. Additionally, I am developing the Calhoun Drum Academy, which will offer an online drum lesson subscription through my website, with lessons for all ages, levels and abilities, covering a wide range of content for drum-set, marching and concert percussion. Each lesson will be filmed at multiple BPMs, allowing the student to practice and learn at their own pace. I will also offer in-depth coaching and advice with each lesson, to help each student feel as if they are taking a private lesson with me. The Calhoun Drum Academy will also serve as an additional practice tool for all students who take private lessons and music classes with me virtually.

"I absolutely love drums and percussion education. It has been wonderful to be able to safely grow my business from home and be able to offer virtual drum lessons to people throughout the US and internationally. I feel I have grown tremendously as a teacher and a drummer. I look forward to taking on more students outside of the US, and I'm very excited to help any aspiring drummer learn to play. It was always my dream to run my own business, on my terms. I am very fortunate to have a very supportive family that helped me through some very tough times. They inspired me to believe in myself and show the world I was still capable of doing great things outside of my past job. I look forward to making a new innovative return to the marching arts – I have a lot of exciting new things in the works!"

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

"Being able to share my passion and talent for drums/music for a living and have it make a positive impact on people's lives."

Do you have any advice or a quote you'd like to share with us?

"My favourite quote is from Rocky Balboa: 'The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place, and I don't care how tough you are, it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard you hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward; how much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done! Now if you know what you're worth, then go out and get what you're worth, but you gotta be willing to take the hits, and not pointing fingers saying you ain't where you wanna be because of him, or her, or anybody. Cowards do that and that ain't you. You're better than that!'"

Image: ErgoSonic Percussion

Next Issue: We speak to Ayami Nakama from the Japan Ground Self Defence Force Central Band

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THE Groove & Feel ISSUE

Masters of Groove

Words: **Geoff Nicholls**

What is groove, where does it come from and, most importantly, how can you improve yours?

Duke Ellington gave us the throwaway line, “There are two kinds of music. Good music, and the other kind”. You could say the same for groove: music either grooves, or it doesn’t.

Of course, in both instances the verdict is subjective. And yet more often than not there is a consensus, there’s something about the beat that makes you want to “get up offa that thing,” as James Brown so unsubtly put it.

In this issue of *Rhythm*, top drummers offer their advice on how to improve your groove. So by way of introduction, let’s touch on some of the terms often associated with the notion of groove.

Far and Wide

In any discussion of groove, words like ‘feel’, ‘pocket’, ‘swing’ and ‘funk’ crop up. A good groove is said to appeal to the emotional and physical rather than the intellectual. That is really Western European musical snobbery – we can ponder the complexities of rhythm and groove just as deeply as harmony or melody. But, certainly, a great groove has an uplifting quality that often evokes a positive emotion of pleasure. Groove brings a smile to your face, you can’t sit still, you are impelled to sway and jig about in some curious fashion which we humans call dancing!

As drummers, we study the milestone beats of overtly groovy funk masters like the drummers of James Brown – or Zigaboo Modeliste, Tiki Fullwood, Bernard Purdie and Mike Clark. But groove has a vastly greater reach. You can get that urge to dance from an Irish jig or a Scottish reel, a New Orleans rag, early rock ‘n’ roll, a Motown anthem, even a machine-based club track.

Correspondingly, the drummers who taught us to groove are gathered from far and wide. Out of Africa came Tony Allen, from Jamaica came Carlton Barrett, from Brazil came Airto Moreira. The best-loved drummers in every field have a unique personal groove, be it ‘Papa’ Jo Jones in Count Basie’s swing orchestra, Art Blakey in bebop, or John JR Robinson on a thousand studio dates.

The Rough and the Smooth

For any groove to feel good it’s reasonable to assume it should be comfortable. But is that always true? Music (like all art) is sometimes designed to make you feel uncomfortable. Such music we often associate with the opposite of groove. Yet it’s not impossible for the two to combine. The Beatles’s ‘Tomorrow Never Knows’ ▷

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Brian Frasier-Moore

“I define groove as the unity of syncopation and consistency, mixed with a splash of feel and dynamics. Make it funky! My top tip to improve groove would be to discover the basis of your beat – discover where you repeat the beat for consistency’s sake, apply the appropriate dynamics and then feel the energy of what you’re expressing.”

Image: Robert Downs Photography

couples a persistent nagging drum beat with a decidedly unnerving, nightmarish soundscape. Led Zeppelin's 'Kashmir' steadily builds an ominous, foreboding atmosphere. But what a groove!

Funk is often associated with groove, yet simultaneously revels in odd syncopations. James Brown's 'Cold Sweat' and the Meters's 'Cissy Strut' are landmarks in funk's evolution. Clyde Stubblefield's equally inspiring 'Funky Drummer' beat meanwhile was sampled to form the basis of literally dozens of top 10 hits. The unexpectedly hip, displaced pulse of these hypnotic patterns delights the ear. Drummers eat up these grooves because they are both technically challenging and anything but mundane.

Keep It Simple and Repeat

Evidently, the off-beat can attract a wide audience as well as the more straight-ahead. But having glanced at these more angular examples of groove, we arrive at the smooth, as epitomised by, say, Earth, Wind & Fire's 'Boogie Wonderland' or the Bee Gees's 'Stayin' Alive'.

"IT'S A MINDSET WHERE THE DRUMMER IS...EMBEDDED FULLY IN THE MUSIC."

Achieving this level of comfort has much to do with simplicity and effortless repetition. In rock, there's no better example than AC/DC. Phil Rudd is as stripped back as it gets, and yet he has a potently infectious groove, never to be underestimated and not as easy as it looks. Four-to-the-floor and keep it churning. There's an unswerving steadiness about it that is reassuring. We're in a cool place and we like it that way.

Four-to-the-floor has a hundred-year history of success through swing in the '30s, which spawned jump-jive in the '40s and shuffle blues in the '50s, through '80s disco and house, onto '90s techno and rave, and a thousand pop-dance hits still today. Soon as you put your foot down, you can hardly go wrong.

In the Pocket

For repetition to work, though, the beats must be in the right place. Here we encounter that elusive phrase 'in the pocket'. Generally, this occurs when everyone in the band feels the groove in the same way. The drummer embodies the essence of the groove and holds it right there – the band and the audience both feel at the same time belonging, secure yet energised. No band was ever more aptly named than Status Quo!

Intuitively, you'd imagine 'in the pocket' means everything is precisely in time, as in the way modern technology allows us to precisely quantise all the instruments. But as we know, just because everything is quantised, lined up on the grid, this does not guarantee a track is groovy.

In fact, common sense might suggest that machines and click tracks are the enemy of groove and pocket. And inevitably much machine-based music is stiff (although that in itself can sometimes be attractive!), but machines can also groove. The whole rave, trance, drum 'n' bass, garage, hip-hop, grime cultures – and myriad offshoots – are testament to this. The robotic/electro nature of machine beats when cleverly marshalled with catchy riffs, sounds and dynamics can drive an audience to ecstasy (literally). Chemical Brothers, Aphex Twin or Squarepusher are testament to this.

Ironically, this hugely varied field has inspired some of today's most exciting and technically gifted drummers – from Jojo Mayer through Mark Guiliana – to develop groove concepts and skills that before the computers and drum machines would have been unimaginable. Chris 'Daddy' Dave's stratospheric scattergun beats are frankly mindboggling, but groove like mad. These drummers combine a thorough knowledge of jazz and funk/fusion history with the vision of J Dilla in a whole new artistic arena.

Developing the Groove

Ever since the digital revolution, drummers have learned to play along with pre-sequenced or click tracks. But just as a perfectly quantised machine is no guarantee of grooviness, so a perfectly on-the-grid drummer is no guarantee either. It's more elusive than that.

There has been much discussion about playing on, or behind, or in front of the click – creating different emotive feels. Some drummers appear naturally to be laid back, while others are pushy.

Maybe there's a clue to pocket here. Each drummer's physiology is unique, putting 'organic' humanity back in the equation. Despite hours of practice, a drummer's bass drum may always land exactly on the grid, while their snare lags by a millisecond or two. It just happens that way – a muscle habit that has grown up over years and gives that drummer a signature which may be their passport to acclaim. Charlie Watts's inscrutable style is a not-inconsiderable factor in the Stones's longevity and mammoth success.

Finding Space

It's frustrating for young drummers to be constantly admonished by old timers to keep it simple, 'play for the song'. It's only natural to want to experiment and throw in all those sharp licks you've been practising. There's a never-ending dynamic between testing the boundaries versus having the confidence to play more sparingly.

Phil Gould in the last issue of *Rhythm* talked brilliantly about this, explaining how 'less-is-more' often works better, especially

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Zigaboo Modeliste

"Groove is something that is felt, and you really can't measure it unless you are playing with other people, and you can feel how they respond to the way that you lay down beats. I liken it to penmanship... When we first start writing as kids we all use the same alphabet, but we make the design of the letters our own. Over time, we learn how to craft them – to make them look pretty – and put our own take on them. It's the same with groove and it takes practise with other musicians – especially bass players – to get that enhancement and understanding of where you are going, how hard you should play, how to articulate your feel within the cycle of a motion, when to stretch out and all those other elements that can enhance and embellish a groove.

"If it's genuine, it's going to feel good, and it's about finding a pocket that you can sit in, where the person you are playing with can understand what you are trying to say. I have played with so many different bass players over the years, and the importance of time – and the rhythm section partnership understanding it and concentrating on it – is crucial for the groove to be established. And when that happens, all the other instruments can go along with it, which makes the whole performance more earthy and satisfying.

"Groove should be a continuous flow, a communication, a sequence of time – and how far you want to reach with it is going to be up to you. You can never have enough practise! I am so grateful to have had the ability to feel what I feel, and for me it's also about spirituality. Being able to transcend your spirit to someone else is a very powerful thing..."

Image: Joby Sessions

if you have a busy bass player as in Level 42. When there's so much complexity/ syncopation going on with the tuned instruments, the drummer who plays straight down the line provides the anchor and reference point for all the surrounding madness. I remember seeing Prince in concert, and his drummer, Michael Bland, did just this. He nailed it brutally, and man, was that band grooving!

Actually, as much as playing sparingly, it's about finding space. 'Give each note its full value' is a phrase often heard in tuition. It leads to the feeling of not being hurried or crowded. Like when a great musician (or sports person or actor, etc) seems to have all the time in the world, whereas lesser players look harried, rushed, uneasy.

In our time there has been no better role model than Steve Gadd. Whether playing the simplest or the most complicated part, there is always air between his every stroke. His bandmates consistently rave about this rare ability – his clarity, evenness of execution, total command of dynamics and pacing.

Get this right and the music seems to float effortlessly. It can't be written down on manuscript, it's a mindset where the drummer is not set on an ego trip but is embedded fully in the music.

There are drummers who crave most of all the look-at-me adulation, the whoops accompanying their solo. Sure, there is a major place for that. But the best feeling for many is when your fellow musicians view you with respect. For such a drummer, it's enough to know they have done their most important job. The audience may be agog at the singer, but the drummer's grooving all night. Job done. Warm feelings all round. ▷

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Steve Jordan

“Groove is kind of like hypnosis – it’s a commitment to a feel that is predicated to making you experience something unique. When you hit the right groove and find the pocket, it’s physical – you can feel the molecules of the space and hear the breath. That empty space actually becomes as important – if not *more* important – than the space you are filling, and you really have to be in touch with yourself to have the belief to commit to that pulse. It’s like your heartbeat, and when we talk about achieving a groove on a song, what we have to remember is that most of the music we love was recorded before everyone started using a metronome or a click track. Consequently, everything was based on people’s commitment to what felt great for the overall good of the music. Different tempos conveyed the different messages of the song – it lived and breathed – and, for me, those are the key ingredients when I’m thinking about groove.

“Groove transcends genre, so do what I did and listen to your favourite players for inspiration and knowledge. Find something with an amazing groove – like *Killer Joe* with Art Blakey, Lee Morgan’s *Sidewinder* with Billy Higgins on drums and Bob Cranshaw on double bass, anything by James Brown with Clyde Stubblefield and John ‘Jabo’ Starks, Benny Benjamin and James Jameson on ‘Don’t Mess With Bill’ by The Marvelettes, or Al Jackson Jr. on ‘Soul Man’ by Sam & Dave, or Roger Hawkins on ‘Mustang Sally’ by Wilson Pickett or James Gadson on ‘Use Me’ by Bill Withers... All killer grooves, all different genres. As drummers, our groove is our signature, and it’s the feel that counts. My favourite music *always* feels great, and when you listen to The Beatles hit that groove on ‘Twist And Shout’, it really doesn’t get any better than that!”

Image: Dan Prakopcyk

Image: Scott Dudelson/Getty

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Jim Keltner

“One thing is very clear to me – just because we are called ‘drummers’ it doesn’t mean that groove is solely our responsibility. It also comes from the arrangement, the other instruments and the singer – in fact, the singer in many cases really can make, or break, the groove and feel of a song. As drummers, we are there to hold everything together, to add colour within the framework of the arrangement, and it was only later in my career that I came to realise that we are truly the last link in the chain when it comes to groove and feel.

“Knowing what a song needs comes from the benefit of experience, and it also comes from hours and hours of listening to the masters – Hal Blaine, Earl Palmer, Al Jackson Jr., Benny Benjamin, Roger Hawkins, John ‘Jabo’ Starks, to name but a few... All those guys that

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Chris 'Daddy' Dave

"Groove is a unique form of expression – a combination of personality and character that makes everyone different... When we are playing music, it's definitely out of our control – we're not thinking about ourselves, and there is no ego involved. It's simply letting something play through us to express art, emotion and feel.

"As a youngster on a constant quest for knowledge, I was inspired by everything and everyone that I hadn't heard before. And when it comes to improving groove and feel, practise and listening are two concepts that you can't go wrong with – but always remember to be yourself, and go in with the perspective that you can learn from anyone..."

influenced me personally are the people you are hearing when I play, and I'll never forget how they made me feel every time I heard them.

"But, I can't talk about groove without also mentioning two of my dearest friends, Ringo [Starr] and Charlie [Watts]. Geez – when you think of the feel on all of those songs! And, of course, Jeff Porcaro, who was truly like my little brother and taken from us way too soon.

"You can imagine the amount of records I have played on over the years, but the ones that I enjoy listening to the most are the ones where the other musicians are playing fantastic and my drums fit in good around them. I love being knocked out by songs and performances – that's the key for me. So if you really listen to what everyone around you is playing, you'll know what to play or what not to play. And, hopefully, make it feel good."

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Andy Newmark

"Groove is intangible – it's feel, emotion and everything that cannot be taught or notated. Ultimately, it's what distinguishes one player from another – the inconsistencies and discrepancies that define our style.

"Everyone's vision of what 'groove' actually is, is probably different. Keith Moon and The Who must have felt that they were grooving, but their sound is quite the opposite of what we'd normally refer to as groove-oriented music! But if everyone is enjoying it, they are all on the same page and it feels good, then that's really all that matters.

"When you approach playing music from a 'feel' point of view, it's an endless discovery... You never stop creating, searching and exploring, and it's this feel that allows you to make a mark. But if your approach is more mathematical and athletic, you are going to be limited as to where you can go – eventually you won't be able to play any faster.

"As drummers, we are never going to get to the point where our time is digitally perfect, and nor do we want to, otherwise we would all sound the same. And that's the danger of today's technology, because when you force a drummer – or a band – to play to a click you can strip away individuality and personality... You don't listen to a Beatles's record and be outraged about the fact that they sped up in the bridge, because the natural ebb and flow of that band playing together is ok – it's what makes it feel good.

"The beauty, though, is that we can use technology to improve our time, and I would encourage every drummer to practise with a click. What everybody wants from us is a steady pulse, so play your favourite beats to a really slow click at around 60bmp, and even if you want to be athletic, do it within the discipline of a click track so that you learn to understand what it is for each note to be in time. The click is a great teacher – and it's our best friend in the practise room – but don't take it on to the bandstand! Let the music be human, take pride in who you are and cherish your idiosyncrasies – they make you, you."

Image: Richard Ecclestone/Getty Images

Image: Deneka Peniston

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Mark Guiliana

"Groove is a rhythmic representation of the connection of body and mind. To improve it, play with other musicians as much as possible... And *listen*, *listen* and *listen*!"

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Michael Bland

"Groove happens when everyone is playing in a consistent space and everything is working harmoniously together. It's where it *feels* the best – even though you don't always know why – and when you're there, you don't want anyone to touch it! I try to work with cats who can get into that common space with me the quickest. When you catch a drummer and a bass player that groove together right out of the box, that is a producer's dream.

"When it comes to groove, you first have to realise your responsibility to the integrity of what's going on around you – it takes an extraordinary amount of discipline to be selfless enough to drop your ego and play for the music. Prince always told us to listen to our neighbour, to integrate and combine, because that's how you become a better musician. Play with as many different people as you can, ideally cats that are older and more experienced so you can learn from them. As a drummer, don't try to fill every hole - you have to leave air, so don't 'talk' until you have to, stay where you are until someone asks for a little more, and give the music just enough of your blood so that it can live and breathe. And when the groove happens, that's the place that I want to be! It's like travelling through a different dimension – an open channel – and I'm just allowing everything to happen naturally. The music is almost playing itself."

"WHEN IT COMES TO GROOVE, YOU FIRST HAVE TO REALISE YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE INTEGRITY OF WHAT'S GOING ON AROUND YOU...."

Image: Joshua Pickering

Image: Francesco Desmaele

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Keith Carlock

"Groove is the ultimate feeling and destination for a rhythm section; it's what we should all strive for every time we play. The rhythm – with everyone locked in together – starts to 'play itself'. You get into a zone, and it just feels amazing. The audience also feels it and has to move, dance, groove together.

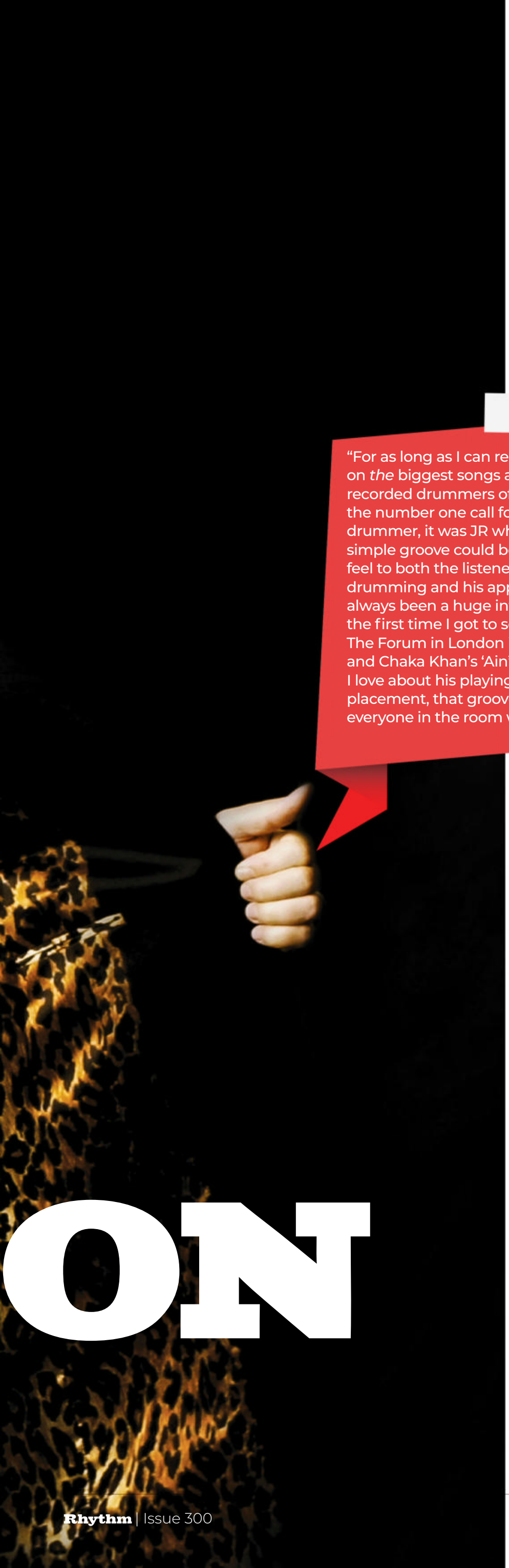
"Technically speaking, the kick, snare, hi-hats, and ride cymbal have to be consistent with all the big accented notes, and the un-accented grace notes and underneath dynamic stuff creates the 'hills and valleys' happening within those big accented notes. All of those details have to work together in a special and musical way. That's where groove comes from.

"To improve groove, the space between the notes you play has to be as consistent as the notes you do play. This is a huge part of what creates the time and flow of your groove. There has to be dynamic consistency within the kit and every note placed with absolute purpose. Also, never underestimate the power of the 'one'."

Images: **Rob Shanahan**

JOHN JR ROBINS

The studio master on keeping it simple and the art of making a song feel good...



ON

THE Groove & Feel ISSUE

KARL ON JOHN...

"For as long as I can remember John JR Robinson has played on *the* biggest songs and records, and as one of the most recorded drummers of his generation, to this day he is still the number one call for the studio. When I was a young drummer, it was JR who opened my ears to how tasteful a simple groove could be, and how good that groove could feel to both the listener and the musician playing it. His drumming and his approach to recording songs has always been a huge influence on me, and I'll never forget the first time I got to see him play live at Zildjian Day at The Forum in London in 1995. His performance of Rufus and Chaka Khan's 'Ain't Nobody' epitomised everything I love about his playing – that feel, that consistency, that placement, that groove and that natural ability to make everyone in the room want to move..."

Karl: "It's such an honour to be talking to you, JR, and I will always remember that first time I got to see you play at Zildjian Day. The line-up was incredible – Dave Weckl, Peter Erskine, Andy Gangadeen, Neal Wilkinson and Chuck Sabo – and with no disrespect to anyone else on the bill, for me the most inspiring part of the day was seeing you sit down on that four-piece kit and play a song and groove... The whole room lifted."

John JR Robinson: "Those were great days, and I vividly remember what it was like as an artist when you got an invitation to perform at one of those events. It was always nerve-wracking thinking about how you were going to compete with great drummers like that, but you just had to go out and do your thing, and obviously one of the songs I'm know best for is 'Ain't Nobody'. I wrote that bass drum part, but it's so hard to play!"

K: "And so many drummers play that track wrong – including me! Is it true that you had to do the bass drum part separately?"

JR: "I actually did kick and snare first and then added hi-hat and fills – so, kind of separately. It was a way of working that was used a lot in the '80s to keep the hi-hats out of the snare mic. I ended up putting a towel on my right leg, so I could at least play eighth notes, but my leg was black and blue afterwards!"

K: "As a drummer that epitomises the word 'groove', how do you actually define it yourself?"

JR: "My mother bombarded me with the concept of 'swing', and she would play me all these big band records when I was just a little boy in the late '50s and early '60s. I basically grew up listening to all those great drummers, and I learned that from 'swing' comes 'groove'. And if you make people move, you are grooving!"

"ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT SLOW IS HARDER THAN FAST; THAT'S HOW YOU'LL IMPROVE YOUR TIME."

K: "Do you think groove and feel are natural things?"

JR: "I do think it's something you are born with – and I thank God that I was born with this feel – but then you use education to work on your technique and your chops. And by chops I don't mean playing as fast as possible... Always remember that slow is harder than fast; that's how you'll improve your time. Yes, we can all open up our brains by studying syncopation, but when it comes to groove and feel, the best advice I can give is to keep it simple and make it feel good.

"As drummers we also need to play with as many different bass players as possible when we are starting out. Those cats are in the same boat as us, and the rhythm section relationship is so important when it comes to groove. There are certain rhythm section combinations that automatically create magic when they play together, and I've been lucky enough to find that myself with Nathan East."

K: "What age were you when you realised that you had a natural body clock in you?"

JR: "I started playing drums at eight, turned pro when I was 10 and was teaching by the age of 12. It all came very naturally for me."

K: "And who would you say have been your biggest drum influences?"

JR: "Buddy Rich – one of the greatest – and Gene Krupa, who, to me, was the first disco drummer. When Krupa played a beat, *everyone* danced! Ginger Baker, too, and I also had my Bonham phase – he 'swung' in straight eighth-note grooves which was incredible. Danny Seraphine was another important guy for me, and then I started getting into Tony Williams and Billy Cobham..."

K: "Most of the drummers that you are talking about would probably not have played to a click track. These days though, most people want us to play to click... How do you feel about that?"

JR: "Well, in modern music everything is done with a digital workstation – it's almost mandatory that everything be synched up – and that's why the click is your friend. I know plenty of drummers who don't like playing with it – they prefer to rush and drag, and in reality, that's the way it should be. That's why the Rufus and Chaka Khan band was so damn good, because we never used a click. But with today's music we have become accustomed to the quantisation, and using a click and being locked into certain tempos means that the engineers can edit and cut if they need to.

"I was first introduced to it when I was studying at Berklee, and I became the 'click guy' there. I listen to the click loud, and I have a very specific sound that I like to use – the Pro-Tools classic 'un-accented' quarter notes. I always tell my students to try a quarter-note click with no accent and to slow it down. That way it becomes a reminder to keep you on the rails, but you can still flow and have enough space to do your thing. And if you're in a band situation you need your own mix, because if everyone is playing so damn loud that you can't hear it, then it's worthless."

K: "I'm sure you never dreamed that you'd become one of the world's most recorded drummers when you set out on this career, but did you always want

ESSENTIAL KIT

DRUMS: DW
24"x18" kick
12"x8" and 13"x9" rack toms
16"x14" and 18"x16" floor toms
14"x4" brass snare
Two 14"x6½" brass (or wood) snares

CYMBALS: PAISTE
15" 2002 Extra Heavy Sound Edge hi-hats
19" and 20" Signature Full crashes
22" Big Beat crash
24" JR Signature Dark Energy ride
24" JR Swish ride

PLUS:
Drum Workshop hardware, Remo drumheads, Axis double pedals, LP Percussion, IP Percussion, Blue Microphones, Avid, Jerry Harvey, Porter & Davis BC2 monitoring system

to be a studio drummer and play songs?"

JR: "When I started out on this journey, of course I never expected that to happen, but I'm very, very happy about that accomplishment and the variety of records that I have had the opportunity to play on over the years. I always wanted to play songs, right from when I was in my very first band, and when I got the gig with Rufus and Chaka Khan and moved to LA, that's when I got the chance to jump on that recording studio bandwagon."

K: "How did you originally hook up with Rufus and Chaka Khan?"

JR: "I was playing a show with a band called Shelter just outside of Cleveland, and Rufus and Chaka happened to see me play. They got up on stage with their band – minus the drummer – and jammed with me, and it was great! So, I went and joined them at their soundcheck the next day, and within a month I'd moved from Boston to LA to work with them. I was still under the radar at that time – nobody knew who I was – and it took me 11 months to actually get a call outside of Rufus!

"Everything changed when Quincy [Jones] produced the Rufus and Chaka Khan record *Masterjam*, and then asked me if I'd be interested in going straight in to record another album with him. That album was Michael Jackson's *Off The Wall* – analogue recording at its peak and engineer Bruce Swedien, God rest his soul, at his finest. There was no digital whatsoever, and when you put that record up against today's music, it still kicks ass! After that, everything really started to happen for me in terms of studio calls."

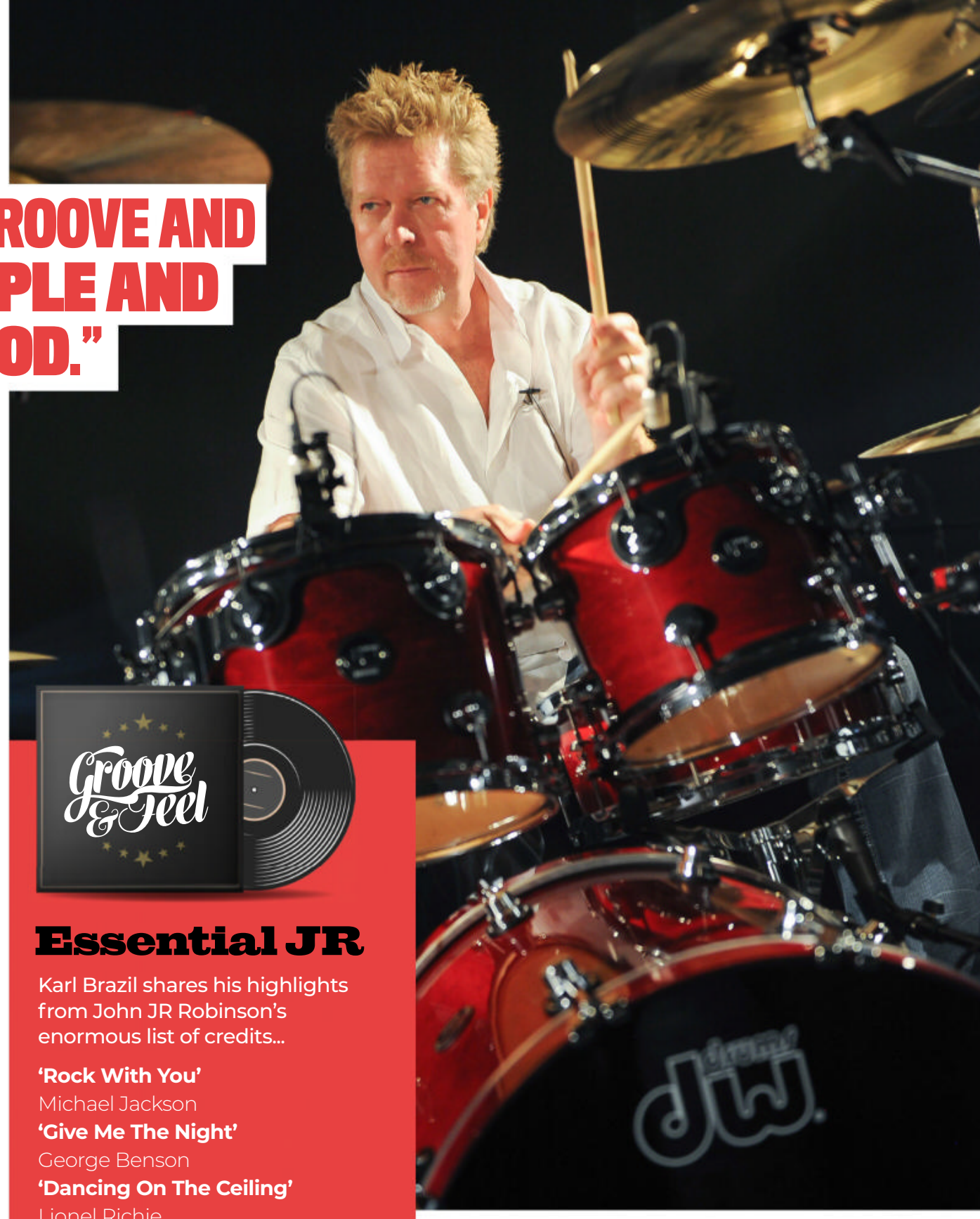
K: "When you go in to do a session, what's your approach?"

JR: "When I first hear a song, I like to memorise it completely, so when I go out and sit on the drums I'll already have the outline in my brain. Then I'll experiment with the demo and work out what does and doesn't work. When we get into the actual recording, if I still don't 'have it' by take two, or three, then it's time to talk to the artist, the producer and the engineer to see what they think."

K: "So you use your ears when you first hear a song. But when you are working out what fills to put in the few gaps that we do get given, what are you choosing the syncopation and the rhythm of the fill from?"

JR: "Definitely the vocals. But there have been times – like on Steve Winwood's 'Higher Love' – when there weren't actually vocals on the track to work with when I recorded it, so I had to guess! But if there are rough vocals, I can see what the answer would be to a phrase. When you are choosing drum parts and fills, always remember that the drummer should not be heard. The drummer should be *felt*. There's a big difference."

"WHEN IT COMES TO GROOVE AND FEEL: KEEP IT SIMPLE AND MAKE IT FEEL GOOD."



K: "And when you have finished a take, do you immediately know that you've nailed it?"

JR: "Absolutely, and the perfect example of that is 'Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough' from *Off The Wall*. Greg [Phillinganes] had a Minimoog, and when we got to the end of that track, the two of us just looked at each other because we knew that we had just cut a number one record. You can't describe that feeling."

K: "Another track I have to mention off that album is 'Rock With You' and that great drum fill at the intro – it's instantly recognisable, and that's writing music in my opinion. Lionel Ritchie's 'Dancing On The Ceiling' has another one of my favourite fills of yours, and with each of those moments you are giving us something that is going to be memorable forever. Do you just come up with them on the day? I'm fascinated to know how you choose what to play and where your mind goes for inspiration..."

JR: "In the early days I studied a bit with Ed Soph. Ed used to have this scenario of 'setup fills' – to set the band up in the same way that the great jazz and big band drummers would have done, like Sonny Payne with Count Basie. It's all about the drummer leading a band into a groove.

"Another classic one is at the beginning of 'Heaven Bound' by Rufus and Chaka Khan. You can drive a truck through the giant hole after that syncopated bass drum hit, and I had complete freedom to do exactly what I wanted to do with them. I also got away with it on 'Higher Love' – there are 20 seconds of drumming up in front of that track. On TV and film sessions though, you don't get that luxury, and when you have to come in on 'beat one, bar one' it's hard, because beats two, three and four often end up being a rush to get into the pocket. It's hard to play groovy when that click comes in on beat one and suddenly you're off!

"With all of my parts, though, I try to think outside of the box. You don't always have to play a crash after a fill, for example – nine out of ten drummers probably would, but why?"

K: "You have turned your hand to so many different things, but do you have a favourite style of music to play?"

JR: "That's an interesting question, and I guess it's depends on my mood – one day I'll feel like playing like Tony Williams, others Billy Cobham and some days I'll just play like myself. But I've still got the kid thing in me that likes to be challenged to try different concepts and feels. I have been producing a lot over the last couple of years, too – which I love – and I also scored some film music recently which was just fantastic."

K: "Different kit setups can immediately make you feel and play differently. When you are doing sessions – or remote recording from home as so many drummers are at the moment – how often do you change your setup?"

JR: "I never change my setup now. Listen, there was a point in my life that my living room had four different kits in it, all miked up and ready to go. But I ended up getting rid of all of that stuff, and now I'm using my 24", 12", 13", 16" and 18" configuration and going between old '70s Black Beauty and DW snares. My second setup is a 1973 Gretsch - 18", 12", 14" and a 5½" matching chrome snare. That's for recording big bands, jazz and Motown grooves. Luckily, I have the studio at my house, so I've done a lot of recording during lockdown."

K: "How does it feel to know that you have inspired a generation of drummers?"

JR: "I think it's great that my generation – Steve Smith, Vinnie [Colaiuta], Peter Erskine and all the other cats – have managed to inspire drummers in the same way that our teachers impacted us. My key word has always been groove, and I have been advocating it for a long time now! Quite simply, it's my way of life and it should never be forgotten or ignored."

Essential JR

Karl Brazil shares his highlights from John JR Robinson's enormous list of credits...

'Rock With You'
Michael Jackson
'Give Me The Night'
George Benson
'Dancing On The Ceiling'
Lionel Richie
'Higher Love'
Steve Winwood
'Greatest Love Of All'
Whitney Houston
'I'm So Excited'
The Pointer Sisters
'I Wonder Why'
Curtis Stigers
'Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough'
Michael Jackson
'Ain't Nobody'
Rufus & Chaka Khan
'Shakey Ground'
Elton John & Don Henley

Image: Will Ireland

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Ash Soan

"I'm going to borrow a line from Steve Gadd here and say that groove is an agreement. When all the musicians playing together agree where the pocket is, where the downbeat sits, etc. That's when it starts grooving. Also, I'd say playing in time and grooving are two different things... If it's in time and to the grid it might look good, but does it feel good? Feel is the way an individual connects the parts of the groove together to make them sound and, ultimately, feel a certain way.

"When I was younger, I balanced playing to a click and playing to music – back then, albums! Albums from the '70s, which may or may not have been clicked, but the records felt good – like Little Feat and Steely Dan... If you get the balance right, it can be a magic combination, so practice both things to improve groove."

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Jeremy Stacey

"When you listen to a piece of music and the whole thing just works as a whole, that to me is groove. Some people define it as a certain type of feel, but personally I don't. I see it simply as the right feel for that piece of music, whatever the genre. All the Steely Dan records grooved, but they don't sound anything like the feel of James Brown, Di'Angelo, or big band jazz. If you enjoy the movement of the piece – the way that it ebbs and flows – then as far as I am concerned, that's a great groove. For both the listener and the player it's an individual response, and when it feels 'right', it's a physical thing.

"Groove has definitely been a journey for me. I have recordings of myself at the age of 16 that nobody will ever hear – my time and feel were not good! But my advice to anybody struggling with theirs would be to *listen*. It really is key and, above everything else, is the one thing every musician should focus on.

"Human internal clocks are all different and imperfect, and I say that your imperfection is actually what determines your feel. Obviously, you have got to be able to play with other people – so learning about the click in terms of keeping time is a good thing. But use it as a practise tool, not as the be-all and end-all of everything... As a drummer your pulse should be steady, but to play perfectly to the click has nothing to do with music as far as I am concerned, and you'd be surprised at how many great records jump around. The reason you don't notice it, though, is because the feel of the band together is *so* good, and that's what matters."

Image: Courtesy of Ash Soan

THE Groove & Feel ISSUE

Ben Thatcher

Images: Various

Royal Blood's powerhouse beatmaker on nailing it live, the significance of space and his trademark monster sound...

KARL ON BEN...

"Ben Thatcher is a man after my own heart and a real example of how to lay down a big, fat, heavy groove and not overcook it. Being in a duo gives him the space to do that, and I have nothing but respect for his technique, the way he approaches the songs and his all-important feel and powerful sound... It's a joy to watch him live with Royal Blood, and, for me, he is one of the best rock drummers out there."

Karl Brazil: "Which drummers were influencing you when you first started playing?"

Ben Thatcher: "For me, it was the rock and metal guys – Dave Grohl, Brad Wilk, Jon Theodore, Chad Smith – but I guess Chad was the person I looked up to most. He made drumming look so fun, and his groove was heavy with that funk element. I was literally addicted to his video *Red Hot Rhythm Method*, with him and Flea playing through tracks from *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*. I watched it over and over..."

K: "Do you think that you were born with a natural groove?"

B: "I started playing very young and had my first proper kit by the age of six, so I do think that there is a seed you are born with. But you need to develop and grow it through practise, and there are definitely some people without that seed..."

K: "Very delicately put, and I agree that it's a natural ability that you can develop through the drummers that inspire you and the music that you listen to. What did you do as a kid to improve your skills?"

B: "I played to a lot of music – nu-metal and, before that, pop, like the Spice Girls and Britney Spears. Pop was a massive thing for me when it came to planting groove actually, because you could play your chops over those songs but also still come back to the groove – whereas the nu-metal stuff was so complex that I would tend to learn the parts, rather than the grooves. I grew up overplaying – wanting to do everything too fast – and it wasn't until I was at college that I began to sit back a little bit."

K: "My dad soundproofed a room for me and I'd play along to albums. Whether it was Level 42 or Journey, I was learning all these different grooves and styles and learning to play with a band. It sounds like you had a very similar start, and one of the things I love about your playing is that it all sounds so easy and relaxed.

"As drummers, one of the first challenges we face when we join a band is how to choose parts... You have great taste in what you play, so what is your approach? Do you have producers contributing, or do you just do your own thing?"

B: "We've never had producers tell us how to play, and we co-produce all of our records. It's mainly Mike and I having a discussion – he has great taste in drums and also comes up with a lot of the parts. Obviously he doesn't have my feel, but he has great ideas, and we work on what the song needs, how we can make it come alive. Rather than just a regular 4/4 thing, we'll try to think about how to incorporate elements, which can be so simple, to spark it up a little bit."

K: "I was actually listening to 'Better Strangers' before this chat – which starts with the kit. When you are playing in a rock band as you are – and I've done bits with Feeder – if a guitar riff is there, the feel and where you slot in is so important. With you guys, there is so much room, but it's like the less you do, the bigger it sounds..."

Image: Adam Gasson

Image: Adam Gasson

“POP WAS A MASSIVE THING FOR ME WHEN IT CAME TO PLANTING GROOVE ACTUALLY, BECAUSE YOU COULD PLAY YOUR CHOPS OVER THOSE SONGS BUT ALSO STILL COME BACK TO THE GROOVE.”

ESSENTIAL KIT

DRUMS: GRETSCH BROADKASTER KIT
22"x14" kick drum
12"x7" side snare
8"x7", 10"x7", 12"x8" rack toms
14"x14" and 16"x16" floor toms
14"x6½" Gretsch USA Black Copper snare
14"x 6½" Ludwig Black Beauty snare
14"x7" Morgan Davies Black Mamba snare (hybrid of birch/walnut/smoked eucalyptus)

CYMBALS: ZILDJIAN
15" K Light hi-hats
19" K Custom Special Dry FX crash
19" Kerope crash
20" Oriental Crash of Doom
21" K Custom Special Dry FX crash
22" K Medium ride
40" Gong

PLUS:
DW 9000 kick pedal, Pro-Mark 5B Fire Grain sticks, Remo and Evans drumheads, Porter & Davies drum throne, Roland bar triggers

B: “Absolutely, and being in a duo you have all of that space. Sometimes it’s great to fill it, but other times it’s fantastic to leave it open – and with that, especially live, if one of us goes off on a diversion, it’s easy for the other one to tag along. It makes things really fun, and of course we don’t have other band members wondering what the hell is going on!”

K: “The sound of the two of you live is just incredible. How did you learn to relax and get to grips with playing in front of those big audiences?”
B: “Experience is a massive key to becoming a great live drummer. Practice will equip you, but once you are behind your kit in front of a crowd you can have the tendency to overplay and play faster because of those nerves. It takes time and a lot of mistakes – and learning from them – before you can really sit back.”

K: “I’ve actually made the mistake of going out and hitting too hard before – my arms have seized up and I’m struggling to grip. Have you ever done that?”
B: “All the time! I call it ‘stiff arm’. It’s the excitement of playing and being in the moment, but if the next song is something like ‘Out Of The Black’, I’m like, ‘Uh-oh...’”

K: “What was your first experience of using a click track live?”
B: “We don’t use click, and we don’t run any tracks in Royal Blood – everything is live. The only time we use it is in the studio.”

K: “It’s so refreshing to hear that. And in that case, your body clock is on the money – you are not moving! How have you developed such good timekeeping?”
B: “I really enjoy the feel of using the click in the studio – it’s a security for me actually, and it makes me realise that I am playing well. I hear it as a percussive thing to play along to, rather than a rule. I would freak out if it was live though, because with a crowd we like to slow them down and speed them up, depending on how we read the room.”

K: “You are such a great song drummer... How would you encourage young players to be the best that they can be?”
B: “When you first sit behind a kit, how does it make you feel? Do you feel excited to be playing those drums? If not, something is wrong! I’ve just got a new kit and I felt like I was 12 years old again when I opened those boxes... It’s about listening to how your kit sounds acoustically in the room – each individual drum – and once

Image: Burak Cingi/Redferns

Image: Roberto Finizio/NurPhoto via Getty Images

you've done that, you've basically got an orchestra, and you can start making something sound groovy.

"One tip from me would be to always have a recording device close by, because when you start playing, within the first couple of minutes you've probably got a beat that someone can work with. You can catch magic in those moments, so be prepared."

K: "You learn so much when you listen back to yourself as well, don't you? Consistency, dynamics, precision, tuning – all the fundamentals... You strike me as a consistency freak, though – I can't imagine you make many mistakes?"

B: "When it comes to recording, I get my bits down very quickly. I will play a part maybe three times and then go listen to it. Like you said, as soon as you hear something back, you know what you need to do. And you don't want a tired performance, you want to be fresh – so if you haven't quite got it, leave it and come back later. That way you will still be excited about the part, not frustrated, and I really think you can hear when fun things are going on.

"For the new record, *Typhoons*, Mike [Kerr] programmed beats to play around with while I wasn't there, and sometimes he'd put two things together that sounded

PLAY ALONG TO...

'Blood Sugar Sex Magik'
Red Hot Chili Peppers
Drummer: Chad Smith

'When The Levee Breaks'
Led Zeppelin
Drummer: John Bonham

'Use Me' *Bill Withers*
Drummer: James Gadson
"What a groove!"

wicked but were impossible for me to play! That gave me the excitement of having to humanise those beats and make them sound even better. Something like that is a great challenge and makes you a better player. Computers can do amazing things and make anything sound great, but it is having that live feel and a real human behind it that *makes* it. Like when you hear the Michael Jackson records with JR Robinson – they just sound rad!"

K: "A lot of stuff you hear now is sound processed, and to be honest, you might just as well have put programmed drums on it. But listen to a Royal Blood album and you hear a real, great-sounding kit and a wicked drummer expressing himself. You have a certain lo-fi groove sound to your kit and you're a Gretsch guy like me... You're currently using a Broadkaster – what made you go for that?"

B: "I had a US Custom but switched to a Broadkaster because it's just that bit warmer. My old setup was 24", 13", 14", 16" and 18", but on my new kit I wanted more variety, so I've gone for 22", 8", 10", 12", 14" and 16". I really am in a drum dreamworld at the moment – they are so much fun!

"When you find a snare with a great sound, use that as your main thing. My drum tech, Matt Morgan Davies, makes the Morgan Davies snares, and they are amazing. We are always trying different things, and recently we actually put a marching drumhead on my Black Beauty, and the 'crack' sounded wicked!"

K: "Have you tried the Gretsch Brooklyn? It's my favourite touring kit at the moment because it's warm. In Robbie's [Williams] 12-piece band, it pokes out a bit more; it's got a bit more resonance."

B: "I have a Brooklyn Micro – 18" kick with 12" and 14" toms – in the jam room when we are on tour, and it's really fun to play. On *Typhoons* there are some real '80s tom parts on tracks like 'Million & One', and I've used it on those as well.

"There are also parts on this new record that feel more 'disco' and are for the dancefloor – which is originally what rock 'n' roll was meant to be before it became something to jump around to. Mike and I were definitely influenced by bands like Justice and Daft Punk – and how they combine that heavy sound with a dance feel – and also by the Bee Gees after watching the recent documentary. The feel of those drums is so inspiring."

K: "With a lot of the Royal Blood heavy riffs, when you find that great spot it's almost like you want to make it feel as late as possible. What's making that pocket feel lazy – is it the kick or the snare?"

Image: Scott Dudelson/WireImage

"COMPUTERS CAN DO AMAZING THINGS AND MAKE ANYTHING SOUND GREAT, BUT IT IS HAVING THAT LIVE FEEL AND A REAL HUMAN BEHIND IT THAT *MAKES* IT."

B: "I think it's a bit of both, and also the space in between those hits. It's almost like when you run into the sea after the wave has gone and then you are running back again to see how far you can go before the wave gets you – and you are pushing it every time!"

K: "And it's great to learn how to push and pull. On stage, as you are not using a click, what is your top tip for timekeeping and keeping that body clock steady?"

B: "I think go with your instinct and you can always sort it out later. But if I get the 'look' from Mike, then within seconds I slow it down! You really feel that energy from the crowd, and it's ok to play a little faster. I often play songs too slowly though, because I'm thinking about getting into the pocket, and when I watch back later it's lacking a little energy."

K: "How do you like your in-ear mix when you are playing live?"

B: "I like everything real low – guitars sounding like little bees – because when I'm playing it makes me laugh that it's so loud, but in my ears it's so tiny. I've also got the Porter & Davies sub on my seat, so I feel everything. I never have cymbals in my ears – just bass, drums and a little of Mike's vocal, all very well balanced."

K: "You lose so much definition on a big stage, and the low end is what you look for as a drummer in order to feel the groove. Having the mix low must be helping you play in an intricate way. Your groove and impeccable feel also shine through – especially in your solos. Do you like soloing?"

B: "Er... no! I remember doing a terrible solo when I was hungover once – I was all over the place. It started off ok and I was going really fast, and then I started messing around, and I turned and saw Dave Grohl, Taylor Hawkins and Chad Smith all standing behind me watching..."

K: "That's quite a panel!"

B: "I was mortified! And, afterwards, I went and apologised to Chad for my terrible performance!"

K: "Well, the solo I saw was well constructed and very musical. Are they on or off the cuff?"

B: "It's different every single night, but we all have our tricks and marker points, don't we? The solo, for me, started on 'Little Monster', and it always began the same way, but it could go anywhere after that... Sometimes I'd find myself repeating the same section over and over, and my head would be going, 'Just get to the bit where you get to hit the gong!'"

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Benny Greb

"Groove is an emotion – something you feel that moves you, usually caused by a pattern or a repetitive phrase that has a strong emotional effect on you. As I explain in-depth with my online programe, *The Art And Science Of Groove*, I found it most effective to look at it, and teach it, from five angles – the five pillars so to speak – that all play a part in producing this feeling we call 'groove'. Those elements are time, feel, sound, body, mind. All five hold keys that make it easier to convey groove, and even though it's possible to have perfect timing, when you lack the other aspects it still doesn't groove.

"So to improve groove, work on all of these while always keeping in mind that groove is the result of how these learnable skills all play together and interact with each other.

"Your groove will only be a strong as your weakest link, and if you're interested in diving deeper, come and check out *The Art And Science Of Groove* at my website: bennygreb.com."

"GROOVE IS AN EMOTION – SOMETHING THAT MOVES YOU..."

Image: Gerhard Kühne

THE Groove & Feel ISSUE

Images: **Mike Pacholuk**

Mickey CURRY

The session supremo on learning from the masters, staying away from the vocals and the importance of the backbeat...

KARL ON MICKEY...

"Mickey Curry is a drummer who set my heart on fire when I first saw him play live. I was blown away by his consistency, his feel, his choice of fills and that incredible left hand of his – he's impeccable! He's a very musical drummer, with such a tasteful groove and great pocket, and whatever the gig – be it Bryan Adams, Hall & Oates, or The Cult – his creativity shines through every time. For me, he's an unsung hero; just go and check out his discography and prepare to be amazed..."

Karl Brazil: "You are one of a select few session drummers that have managed to nail both the live arena and the studio, and it's very inspiring for people to see you doing both things so successfully. Under the umbrella of groove, what would you say are the fundamental elements of your drumming when on stage or recording?"

Mickey Curry: "I think simplicity first and foremost and a big, solid backbeat – always making sure that the kick drum lands where it needs to be on the downbeat. It can be a little on top or a little behind, depending on the song, but with the right combination of those two things you can set a groove. Some drummers are brilliant at playing on top and pushing, which creates a certain energy that a track, or a band, might need. Then there are the players that can drop their left hand just ever so slightly back, and those are the guys that I have always admired, because that for me is where the greatest grooves come from. John Bonham was a master of landing the kick on the downbeat and having that backbeat ever so slightly behind."

K: "Hearing you say that, it feels like an appropriate time to mention your own playing on The Cult's 'Fire Woman'. I love your performance on that track – the four-on-the-floor kick and your snare backbeat land so consistently... Teaching feel is one of the hardest things, but I've always thought that listening and playing along to records that you connect with is the best way of understanding and appreciating exactly what it is. As a young drummer, how did you develop your impeccable sense of time, groove and feel?"

M: "When I was first starting out I would do exactly that – play along to the records that felt good to me, like the great Motown classics, anything out of Stax, a lot of R&B... And what a wonderful education it was to learn from drummers like Al Jackson Jr., Bernard Purdie, Roger Hawkins and Benny Benjamin – true masters in setting a groove and making that music feel great. Nobody was using click tracks at that time, so there is a wonderful organic quality to those records, too. So that's really where my foundation of groove came from – playing along and learning to keep time.

"As I got more into drumming, I started stealing from my favourite cats, from the Zeppelin albums in particular, but also Danny Seraphine from Chicago and Gerry Conway – every Cat Stevens track that he played on just feels 'right' because of his left hand and where he drops that backbeat."

K: "I always loved the discipline of playing a record from start to finish – it was like going on a musical journey, and it helped me enormously when I found myself in the position of having to put set lists together. And playing to different records was like doing lots of different gigs all in one night – great for versatility..."

M: "I was really into Billy Cobham for a while, and I would play along to his first two solo records, *Spectrum* and *Crosswinds*, time after time. The thrill of eventually nailing *one* drum fill is something I will never forget, and to this day I still get that same feeling when I nail something in the studio."

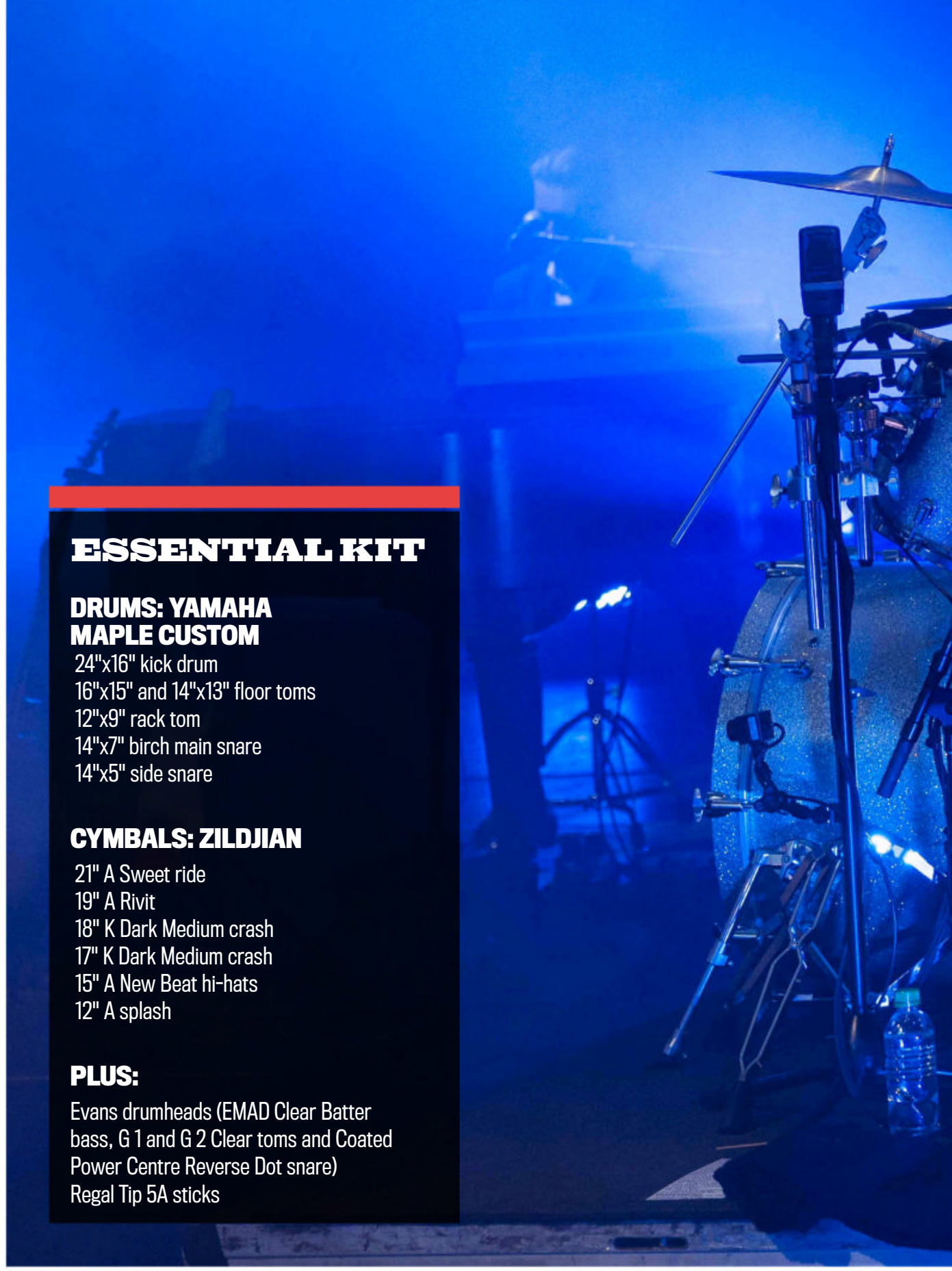
K: "How old were you when you played your first gig?"

M: "Growing up we were surrounded by music at home – everyone in my family played something – and I was 12 when I did my first gig with three of my brothers at high school. We were on the school council and it was the council that picked the band for the dances, so we would choose ourselves! Starting to play in bands was another huge part of my drum education, and I think musicians struggle and learn in equal measure when they begin playing with other people. But the more people that you can play with, the more you will learn about how to interact with other musicians' perspectives. Play wherever you can, whatever you can, whenever you can."

K: "You have played with so many different bass players during the course of your career. Like us drummers, every bass player is different... Do you let the bass player lead, or do you stick with where you feel the groove is?"

M: "It depends on the situation. You have to lean on a bass player, because if the rhythm section isn't working, everything is going to fall apart. I have played with so many amazing bassists, but I have to give a special mention to Tom 'T-Bone' Wolk. People throw the word genius around, but he was so gifted. I didn't have to think about anything when he was on bass, and it was the same with Norm Fisher with a lot of Bryan's [Adams] later stuff."

K: "Both of us are drummers that play songs, and I am never really comfortable when I am sat at a kit by myself – I much prefer to interact with other musicians...



ESSENTIAL KIT

DRUMS: YAMAHA MAPLE CUSTOM

24"x16" kick drum
16"x15" and 14"x13" floor toms
12"x9" rack tom
14"x7" birch main snare
14"x5" side snare

CYMBALS: ZILDJIAN

21" A Sweet ride
19" A Rivit
18" K Dark Medium crash
17" K Dark Medium crash
15" A New Beat hi-hats
12" A splash

PLUS:

Evans drumheads (EMAD Clear Batter bass, G 1 and G 2 Clear toms and Coated Power Centre Reverse Dot snare)
Regal Tip 5A sticks

Is it the same for you?"

M: "Absolutely. I can't be the focus – I have to be the accompaniment... Always! If you put the spotlight on me, I am going to choke. But that said, you don't want to be the weak link in the chain either. You need to carry your weight and contribute your part to making the song feel great."

K: "It really is poetry in motion watching you play a ballad like 'Heaven' live with Bryan Adams – your simplicity, your understanding of feel and your body clock are all such natural parts of your drumming. Do you think feel and a sense of groove are a natural ability, and when did you realise that you had it and were ready to get out there?"

M: "I do think that there is an element of natural ability that we are born with, but I don't think I've ever actually felt ready to go out there – I'm still always just incredibly grateful when somebody wants to hire me to play!

"I did my first real session at the age of 15, in a little studio in Connecticut. It was for

Essential Mickey

Karl Brazil shares his favourite tracks from Mickey Curry's back catalogue...

'Hey Stoopid' – Alice Cooper
'Fire Woman' – The Cult
'Run To You' – Bryan Adams
'Get Out Of My Way' – Daryl Hall
'Back Where You Started' – Tina Turner
'Dream You' – Roy Orbison
'Cuts Like A Knife' – Bryan Adams
'Read About Love' – Richard Thompson
'She's A Star' – Survivor
'Private Eye' – Hall & Oates
'Blue Chair' – Elvis Costello
'What Kind Of Love' – Rodney Crowell
'Under The Same Sun' – David Mullen

"WHAT A WONDERFUL EDUCATION IT WAS TO LEARN FROM DRUMMERS LIKE AL JACKSON JR., BERNARD PURDIE, ROGER HAWKINS AND BENNY BENJAMIN – TRUE MASTERS IN SETTING A GROOVE AND MAKING THAT MUSIC FEEL GREAT."

a bank commercial, and I remember my mum had to transport my drums. I was done in three minutes and they gave me $50 – I was so excited! I got called back and actually worked in that same studio for a number of years – all to tape at that point of course. It was great experience to do all of those different sessions, and the studio became a very comfortable place for me as a result."

K: "When I was starting out, I was fearful of the click. How did you cope with it early on, and what's your advice for drummers who may be struggling with it?"
M: "I was definitely afraid of it when I first started doing a lot of session work. When you are young, you just want to play what you want to play, and go where you want to go... The whole idea of keeping it steady was completely foreign to me, but then I started to use the click like another instrument – almost like a percussionist. So my advice would be to definitely change the sound of it to something that works for you – that you can play along to – and remember that it will get easier.

"Even now, I always ask for click in the studio. I know that my time is ok, but I just want to be sure that if they have to edit – or slice tape as we used to do – that it's consistent. I tend to go for the eighth note, 16th-note thing – so the click is washing through as opposed to slamming me in the side of my head!"

K: "Making a drum fill recognisable is a real talent, and you are a master when it comes to filling those gaps... When you are choosing a fill, what are you listening to, and where is the inspiration coming from?"
M: "Daryl Hall is a genius, and I learned from him a long time ago to never, ever, ever play over a vocal. If someone is singing, just keep time, because when that song comes on the radio, people are not going to be singing your drum part! Daryl is such a great singer – his feel and everything about his vocal is ridiculous – and he taught me not to step on the vocal, but to get a groove going and to make it feel right. Put the fill between a verse and a bridge, or a chorus or a solo – those are the obvious spots for them."

K: "It's really interesting to hear you say that because one of my favourite quotes in this issue of *Rhythm* is from John JR Robinson when he says that a drummer shouldn't be heard, a drummer should be *felt*. And I couldn't agree more..."
M: "JR is one of my all-time favourite drummers and such a great guy. I was literally shaking when I met him for the first time at a Yamaha Groove Night at the NAMM Show. Just listen to Michael Jackson's 'Off The Wall'. There is not a better drum track – it's just ridiculous how great his playing is on it."

K: "When you go in to do a session, what's your approach, and what advice do you have for players that might be heading into a studio for the first time?"
M: "I'm listening first and foremost, and to begin with I will always just play along

with the track – perhaps trying a shuffle thing or a four-on-the-floor. One of those patterns is going to fit whatever it is... I think about all the great session drummers, like Steve Gadd, Jeff Porcaro, Bernard Purdie, James Gadson – the guys who played on all those great records. They probably had the same approach: play what you know, keep it simple, don't overplay and don't try to do something that you can't do. Think about basic quarter notes, basic eighth notes, no fills, cymbal crash on the downbeat... Do what you are comfortable doing, and the more that you do that, the more comfortable you will get doing it and the more choices you will ultimately have.

"When you are starting out it can be incredibly disappointing to hear back what you just played, because you might have thought that something was really good. But stay positive, because ultimately, you are going to learn from those experiences."

K: "Growing up you always knew that you wanted to be a session musician, and, like me, you were a huge fan of Jeff Porcaro. You never got to meet him in person, but you did get the chance to see him play live with Steely Dan, didn't you?"

M: "I have honestly never had a drummer affect me like Jeff Porcaro did live – it was incredible to see and hear him... What he was doing wasn't complicated, but the simplicity, the intensity, the control and the aggression of how he played – without speeding up or hitting that hard – was breathtaking. You knew that he was capable of so much more – he had amazing technique and chops, but he only used them when absolutely necessary."

K: "When you put the sticks down at the end of a take, do you know by the emotions you have felt when you were playing that it's the one?"

M: "Well, I know if the track has worked for me, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to work for the person that I am recording with... Generally, though, when it feels right to me, it's usually pretty good for everyone else, too.

"That said, I have had situations where I have hated what I played and everyone else has loved it! And that can be weird because I am very self-critical, and I want to be happy with what I've done. I always put a lot of pressure on myself to deliver. For me, the first and second takes are always going to be the best – I'll never play like that again because it's free and spontaneous. They have a special energy, and when I overthink something, it becomes mechanical and I can't execute it as well."

K: "You are the body clock, the heartbeat of Bryan's band... Do you use a click live?"

M: "No, we don't use anything live. I've been touring with Bryan since 1987, so we are all in tune with each other, and it's so much fun to be part of that band. And honestly, if it's not fun, don't do it! We have been playing those big shows and those famous songs together a long time now and it's a well-oiled machine – we all fall into our own spot and we each have our own little bag of tricks. And Keith Scott [guitar] is just incredible at holding everything together."

K: "James Blunt is my longest-standing gig and each song pushes and pulls. I'm always watching James's foot, and it's my job to bring him back into place if he gets distracted. Things like that only come from being on a gig for a long time, I guess?"

M: "It's funny, because I am pretty much directly behind Bryan on stage, so I am watching his foot, too, and he likes to pull. Some nights it feels like we are playing the songs twice as fast as we would normally do them... I keep a little Doctor Click by me now – just so I can check that we are close to where we need to be."

K: "Another aspect of your drumming that really stands out for me when I watch you play live is the consistent velocity of your snare strokes. When you are playing arenas, that's a big space that you have to fill..."

M: "When it comes to snare strokes, tuning and having the kit sound the way that you want is really important. You learn where you want to hit, where that sweet spot is... It's also about making sure that you've got a great mix in your cans, and I'm so lucky with Bryan's sound engineer, Rob [Nevalainen]. He's a drummer too, and it's like being in a recording studio when we are playing live, so I also get that dynamic. And I will literally play everything like it's being recorded when we are doing a show. I always have in my head that the thing I just played might possibly be my last, so it had better be right!"

"IF SOMEONE IS SINGING, JUST KEEP TIME, BECAUSE WHEN THAT SONG COMES ON THE RADIO, PEOPLE ARE NOT GOING TO BE SINGING YOUR DRUM PART!"

Image: Michael Agel

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Dennis Chambers

"Groove is when you hear or feel something that hits you so hard your body starts to move, and it makes you want to dance! When you listen to James Brown, Bootsy Collins, Parliament and Funkadelic, The Meters, Prince or Tower of Power – if you can't feel *that* then cancel Christmas, you're dead! Groove can be taught by listening to the drummers that do it, but the guys who are born with it don't have to be told anything. They just know it, and they are the ones with the deep pockets."

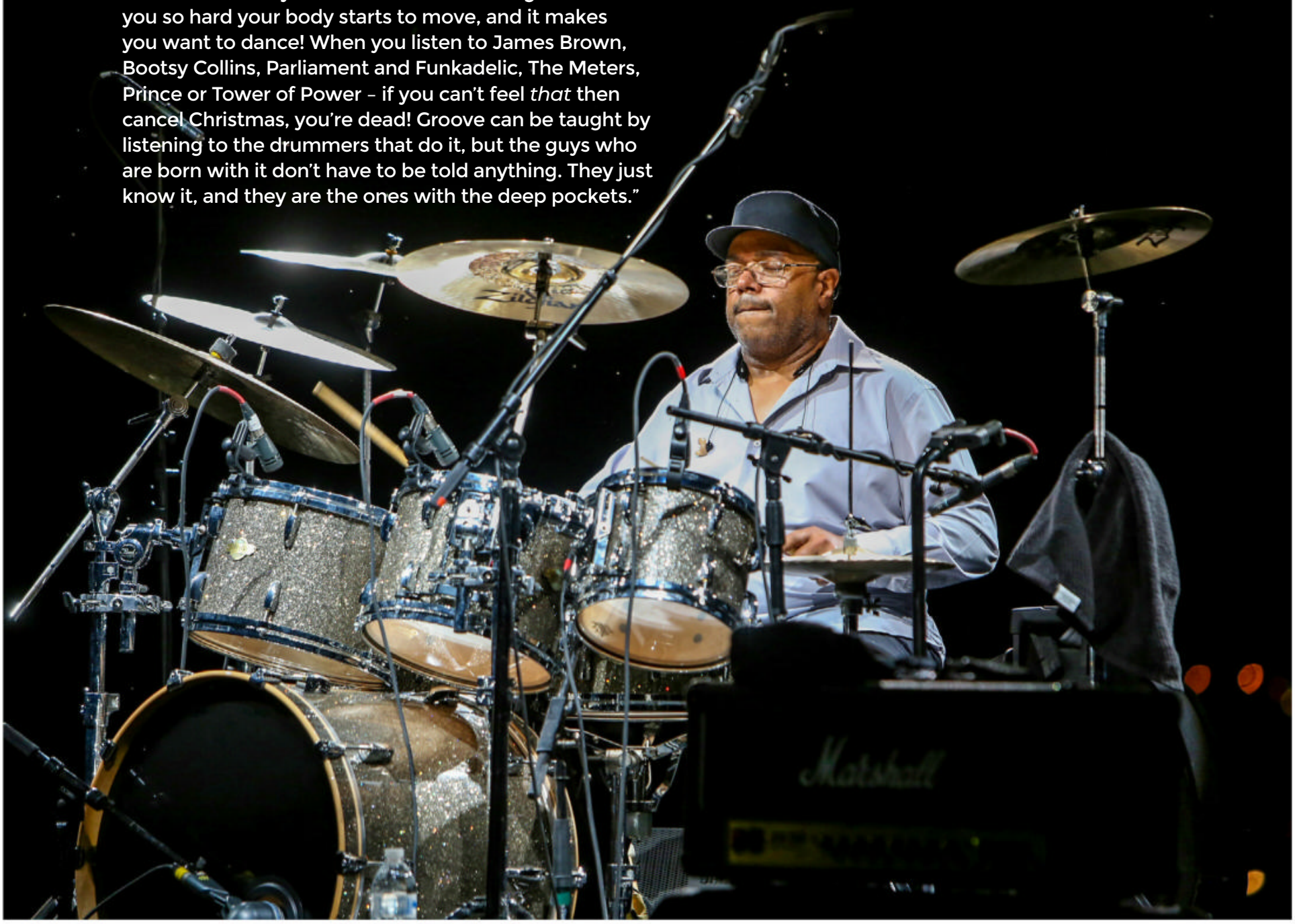


Image: Monica Morgan/WireImage

IMPROVE YOUR GROOVE

Steve Ferrone

Image: David Phillips

"You don't hear groove, you *feel* groove. It's about taking a song and finding that sweet spot where all of a sudden it just feels right and everything can hang off it, creating space and a comfort zone for other people to play. It's also about consistency – establishing a pocket that generates an emotion inside of you and makes you want to dance.

"People ask me if I listened to drummers like Ringo, Charlie Watts, Bernard Purdie and John 'Jabo' Starks growing up. No, but I listened to *songs* by The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, James Brown and everything that Bernard played on. So instead of practising to a metronome, my advice would be to grab your favourite songs and play along to them, because that's how you'll start to feel and understand groove. By developing your own internal metronome, when you then go back to playing with a click it's all going to be so much easier..."

THE Groove & Feel ISSUE

Alex TORJUSSEN

Images: **Christian Tierney**

On nailing it live with a click and why it's all about the bass...

KARL ON ALEX...

"Alex's incredible ear for a song, combined with his unique sound and feel, have landed him some of the biggest gigs in recent years with the likes of Niall Horan, Isaac Gracie, Jade Bird and James Morrison. As a young drummer making his mark on the session scene, I really admire Alex for standing out from the crowd with his old school approach to playing for the song, his attention to detail, and his simplicity and consistency on the kit."

Karl Brazil: "It's great to have you involved in this, Alex, and I'm going to kick things off by asking if you think that you have a natural ability for feel?"

Alex Torjussen: "I've spoken to a lot of people about this, actually. Some people say you can teach feel, but I think there is a natural element to it."

K: "So do I, and Steve Lukather puts it well when he says that some people are pitch perfect, some people can dance in time and some people can't sing in tune... I think some of us are born with more of it than others, but you can work on it.

"When it comes to groove, not many young dudes are playing for the song in the way you do. I love chops as well, but even in a drum solo I want to hear musicality, which you have. What's your mindset as a drummer when you sit down to play – who are you listening to?"

A: "I'm always listening to the singer and their phrasing. On gigs where you do not have playback or click, the singer is going to have a lot of influence over the feel. I love bass, and it's a massive part of groove. There has to be an understanding between bass and drums and you have to lock in together. When you sit down with a band, you know instantly if it's happening or not."

K: "Absolutely. Have you worked with bass players that have pulled you, or are slightly behind, and you've had to adapt what you are doing as a result?"

A: "I have, and my favourite bass players are the guys that naturally sit just behind. We have a mutual friend – Oscar Golding – and when I play with him he makes me sound like a much better drummer than I am because of where he sits."

K: "What you do is great, and Oscar does a very smart thing on the bass, because he ghosts a lot of notes in between, so there is syncopation between the drums and bass. He's a dream to play with, as is Leland Sklar – who makes you feel like he's giving you a big hug! He just stays with you. When bass and drums are moving together and it sounds good, you really don't need to do much – even the smallest fill where the bass goes with you is joyful."

A: "Another thing that can have an impact on groove and feel is if you're running click and tracks. I've had situations where people are listening more to the click than the drums. Most of my experience with click has been in the live arena, and there have been times when I have listened back to stuff and asked how much click everyone has, as opposed to the drums. And when people took the click almost completely out of their ears, it instantly felt 100 times better."

K: "That is so insightful, and going back to Steve Lukather again, he said that in sessions Jeff Porcaro would ask everyone to turn their

▷

SEN

“I’M ALWAYS LISTENING TO THE SINGER AND THEIR PHRASING. ON GIGS WHERE YOU DO NOT HAVE PLAYBACK OR CLICK, THE SINGER IS GOING TO HAVE A LOT OF INFLUENCE OVER THE FEEL.”

clicks off. We all feel ‘feel’ in a different way, and a drummer with great pocket should be allowed to govern the time and boss that situation. Otherwise, as you say, the band isn’t listening to the drums, they’re listening to the click.”**

A: “And suddenly you have six different pockets happening at the same time! Ultimately, it’s a team effort though, isn’t it, and I have learnt so much from the great bass players and guitar players that I have worked with.”

K: “A lot of drummers do struggle with the click, but having the right mix can be a big help. What is the loudest thing in your mix – the click or the drums? And how do you have your mix balanced?”

A: “The click and the track percussion stuff are loudest – I barely have any drums in my ears, because things happen naturally when I’m not thinking about what I need to play or how I sound. I was lucky to have a few chats with Victor Indrizzo a couple of years back, and he spoke about having drums really low in the mix. It was a game changer for me, actually. Whether it’s with Niall, or whoever, I have to hang with the tracks. I can’t move. My philosophy is, wherever my pocket is – because it’s not changing every night – I am confident that that is where the time is. I hope that doesn’t sound arrogant...”

K: “Absolutely not, that’s confidence and that’s what you need from a drummer. Like you, I enjoy the responsibility of playing the click and knowing where I am. Finding that groove and pocket can sometimes be hard, though. Have you had situations where something just doesn’t feel right and you’re not sure why?”

A: “I had that once with James [Morrison]. There was one track where I was feeling the swing totally differently...”

K: “And sometimes the drummer will blame themselves in that situation, but you have to find out *why* it isn’t feeling right. With Robbie’s [Williams] band – where there can be 12 people playing a song – if something isn’t quite synched it’s a horrible feeling, and we’ve had to ask everyone to play individually before to work out what’s going wrong.”

A: “I’ve been in situations where I’ve been playing with people a lot older than I am and something just wasn’t happening, but I’ve known that it wasn’t me. Let’s just say it can be ‘interesting’ getting around that in a diplomatic way!”

K: “Especially when you’re the youngest guy in the room. But these are situations that all of us will encounter at some point. You’re already so experienced in the live arena, and on those big shows there is a lot going on; you are grooving away, trying to make it feel good, and at the same time you

ESSENTIAL KIT

DRUMS: A MIX OF GRETSCH, LUDWIG & YAMAHA

22"x14" bass drum
12"x8" rack tom, 16"x16" floor tom and 14"x5½" Ludwig Black Beauty snare

“My first kit was a red Gretsch Blackhawk, and with Niall I’m using a Broadkaster. The shells are quite thin and give you that really nice low-end sound from the kick and the toms, which is great for the bigger rooms we are playing. I don’t actually have a drum endorsement, and I like the freedom and flexibility that that gives me.”

CYMBALS: ZILDJIAN

14" Avedis hi-hats, 18" and 19" K Dark crashes, 22" K Light ride

“Such an iconic brand of cymbals and such a recognisable logo. I saved up and bought my first professional set when I was 18, and it was a special day when Zildjian’s Tina Clarke signed me as an endorsee.”

PLUS:

Remo drumheads (Coated Emperors on toms, Clear PS3 on kick, Coated CS Dot on snares) and Vic Firth 5B drumsticks

PLAY ALONG TO...

Chaka Khan Live At Roxy Theatre, 1981
"Steve Ferrone is on drums for this one. Go check it out on YouTube – it's absolutely ridiculous; the band has complete confidence in playing time."

'You're The Man'
Marvin Gaye
"This is funky as hell!"

'Inside Job'
Little Village
"A super group with Jim Keltner. This is the most swung, half-straight beat – it's amazing!"

'Let Me Have It All'
Sly And The Family Stone
"This is such a naughty drum part from Andy Newmark."

are also thinking about queuing up the next song, you're watching the band, watching Niall... I don't get nervous about my ability on stage, but I do get nervous about the technology failing! What helps you stay relaxed?"
A: "I feel very safe behind a drum kit, and actually playing an arena doesn't feel nearly as intimidating as a small room with 200 people, because you can't see their eyes! I'm responsible for starting all of the tracks with Niall, so if I do mess up it's not going to be pretty... I'm quite particular about my click sound – I need something organic like a wood block that I can really dig into – and when we are playing slower songs in those big rooms, I'll always use an eighth-note click, not quarter notes, just to have that safety net."

K: "You have a real maturity as a drummer, and you've definitely found your sound with that simple setup. When you were younger, what did you do to develop your timekeeping and feel?"
A: "A lot of listening and practising with a click. My dad was always playing music in the house – a lot of '70s funk and all the classic British rock bands – so a lot of the records I would play along to were actually recorded without click. I got my first kit when I was seven, but I didn't take a real interest in it until I was 11. I categorically remember sitting down properly for the first time and trying to play along to a ZZ Top tune! Also, I was very lucky in having Stu Roberts' guidance early on in my life – he's an incredible musician and drummer. He got me listening to Steve Gadd and focused a lot on the musical aspects of playing, rather than everything being about technique."

K: "Who would you say were your main drumming influences?"
A: "Ash [Soan] was a big one, and, without blowing too much smoke, you! I was really into the UK guys that I would read about in *Rhythm*, and Steve Gadd and Andy Newmark were massive for me, too.
"When I was starting out, I really struggled with confidence and you have to just get through that. Practise and play with as many people as possible, because if you can go into a situation feeling that you *can* do it, you will sound so much better straight away. It can be hard to get into that mindset, but it is so important."

K: "Growing up, I actually listened to a lot of Don Henley. Don isn't a drummer's drummer, but he does have a particular feel, and he's a superb singer. The Eagles' songs are so good that you stop listening to the drums and sing the melody, and when you play and sing you can see why Don was so simplistic and why he filled those gaps. It was a real education, because when I started singing along to stuff, it helped me play the right fills in the right places. How do you choose fills?"
A: "Most of the time I try to keep things as simple as possible – in a pop context. People know what to expect when they hire me now, and they know that it will be song oriented. Clack-boom-dagger-dum works every time, doesn't it?!"

THE Groove & Feel ISSUE

Jeff Porcaro

Words: Robyn Flans

The inspirations behind the Session King

Rhythm celebrates the feel, groove and pocket of the ultimate song drummer and his incomparable ability to play the perfect part.

During and after his time on this planet, Jeff Porcaro has been known by every moniker containing the word *groove*: Groove Master, the Man with the Golden Groove, the groovemeister... The reason is because in the large, wonderful pool of drummers, there really is no one who made a song feel the way Porcaro did. Groove was probably the most used word in my recent book, *It's About Time: Jeff Porcaro, The Man And His Music*, and was uttered by so many people I interviewed.

In addition to his Grammy-winning band Toto, Jeff was sought after by the pinnacle of pop and rock artists throughout the '80s and early '90s for his incredible sound and what he could bring to the song. Nearly 30 years after his untimely passing, Jeff's groove still inspires drummers all over the world.

Fellow players thought of him and continue to think of him as the best groove drummer of his time. When talking about the Steely Dan track 'Parker's Band', which Porcaro cut alongside drummer Jim Gordon, Steely guitar player Denny Dias said he felt Porcaro was the reason the track was so solid: "Jeffrey laid down a groove and there was no escaping it". Donald Fagen (Steely frontman) told me: "It's often difficult to pick out one rock 'n' roll drummer from another, but he had a groove that he developed; a really popping groove, so we thought we'd use him".

The first time Vinnie Colaiuta met Porcaro was at a Tom Scott session, as a guest of his bassist friend Neil Stubenhaus. "The groove was just nuts," Colaiuta recalled. "It was sort of like a samba-kind of funk groove that Jeff just killed all the time. It just felt so amazing to hear it. It was like magic."

Producer and guitarist Jay Graydon described Jeff's individual pocket: "I know every drummer's groove in town. I know where every drummer puts the pocket. What was special about Jeff's pocket was that he put the snare backbeat just a little late – I'm talking about microseconds late – to be on the backbeat of the time. And then everybody else was supposed to play center time, and that's what was meant to make it feel really cool – and it did."

Engineer Niko Bolas explained: "The thing about all of the Toto tunes is the groove. You can replace, take away, try different ideas, but you can't get rid of the groove, and that's all Jeff. 'Africa' was written based on that groove, and then Jeff's thoughts and imaginations about Africa. The ultimate litmus test of anything, and where you will always find Jeff at the top 10, is when you're walking down the produce aisle in the grocery store – whatever you're hearing, I guarantee you you're only really hearing the groove and the melody. Jeff was the consummate leader in that." ▷

KARL ON JEFF...

"Jeff Porcaro is the first drummer I ever heard, and to this day he is still my favourite drummer on record and quite possibly the best 'song' drummer ever in my opinion... His passion, creativity and personality on the instrument shine through, and his choice of what to play on a track was always so tasteful. Jeff's feel, backbeat, groove and pocket were impeccable and, when I listen to him play, I'm always aware of how perfectly that snare drum is landing. Jeff is still a constant source of inspiration for me – he really could embrace any style and was the ultimate session guy..."

Image: Rick Malkin

Bassist Nathan East laughed as he asserted that even Porcaro's count-off before the song began had a deep groove. "He would start clicking his sticks together, and it felt so good and before you even got to one, you had a running start."

And it doesn't get much better than Bruce Springsteen calling Porcaro's grooves "deep and beautiful".

Porcaro began internalising music while in his crib in his Connecticut home. Jeff's father, Joe, told me that after he and his wife Eileen would put their baby in his crib at night, they would play Miles Davis's 'Bags' Groove' on their Victrola. It wasn't long before the baby was actually singing Davis's solo.

While all three Porcaro boys were initially drawn to the drums, each eventually found his true calling, and drums was Jeff's. By age eight, he was taking some lessons from his father and accompanying him to the Hartford Symphony where Joe played percussion, as well as to the drum store where he would take an occasional lesson from his dad's teacher, Al Lepak, and some of the other drummers who might be available.

Porcaro was 10 when The Beatles hit the household like a tonne of bricks, and

Image: Rick Malkin

as Steve Porcaro told me, the brothers all mentally said, "I want to do this".

Porcaro's practicing really became serious when they moved to Los Angeles in 1966, where they rented a house and he was able to have a space to play drums. He would come home from junior high every day, go into the den, put headphones on and play to 'Boogaloo Down Broadway' (by Fantastic Johnny C with Earl Young on drums).

"The drums were cool on that, and I used to dig that feel," Jeff said. "I used to play with all The Beatle records, all the Hendrix records, and that's where I think I got a lot of the versatility as far as being able to play authentically one kind of music as opposed to the complete opposite. It's copying what every other drummer did on records. If a drummer takes something Bernard Purdie played on and sits for two weeks with the phones so he can still hear Bernard, but he's also playing along where he doesn't hear himself flamming with him or rushing – just grooving with the tune – the next time he goes to play a tune that's similar, he might start playing that feel.

"I can't tell you how many tunes I've played where I've ripped off the same

Memories of Jeff...

LELAND SKLAR

The bass supremo on working with Jeff Porcaro and that all-important rhythm section connection

Image: Rob Shanahan

"Jeff was one of the bravest musicians I have ever known – he had this great gut instinct about what a song needed, and he wasn't afraid to follow it. I'll never forget one particular David Crosby track that we did... Every other drummer would have just played a rhythm groove, but Jeff pulled out his brushes and created this ethereal percussive part. It was just perfect.

"When you have known someone for as long as I knew Jeff, there is an organic thing that happens between you when you play. We did literally hundreds of sessions together, and I knew that if I was on a date with Jeff, I was going to have a good time. We loved hanging together, we loved playing together and it's mindboggling to think what he could be accomplishing now.

"One of the most enjoyable aspects of my career has been working with so many different drummers and being able to go from someone who sits so far back on the beat stylistically that we are almost on the previous song, to the guy who is so far on top of the beat that they are already on the next song. It's a case of finding your place, making that rhythm section work and, ultimately, making it feel good. Locking in with Jeff was effortless – he was so fluid, almost like he didn't have bones! – and he played through his heart and his soul.

"When we talk about groove and feel, so much of it is visceral – it's your heartbeat, your pulse... Even when you break things down and look at where two different drummers lay the pocket, it's remarkable what a nanosecond can do to a backbeat, and how the feel of that exact same part changes when it is played by two different people. Jeff and Carlos Vega have always been two of my favourite drummers to work with.

"When young musicians ask for advice, the first thing I tell them is that it all depends on what they intend to do with music. Do you want to just be in a band and have the enjoyment of that, or do you want to do studio work, which is going to require you to be a reader, to be more malleable and to assimilate different styles?

"With all the remote recording now, I don't want the younger generation to miss out on that experience of being in a room together, and the creativity that flows from that interaction with other musicians. It's how the magic happens...

"Groove and feel are so subjective, but I'd encourage people to play along with songs and record themselves. Listen back and don't get frustrated – things happen when you work at them, so persevere. Play with as many different musicians as you can, because that's where you'll learn the ebb and flow and the give and take of playing music in a band. And always remember that it's not about you doing your thing, it's about the song. Let it breathe, let it be organic and let it have a life of its own..."

JEFF'S GEAR...

In his early days, Jeff played Slingerland, Ludwig, Camco and Gretsch, sometimes preferring large diameter (24" and 26") bass drums. He had many snare drums, including Ludwig Black Beauties and Slingerland Radio Kings, and he borrowed cymbals from his dad, jazz drummer Joe. He was always experimenting with sound and drums, and would use a different setup and tuning for whatever the gig or session required.

From 1982, Jeff prominently endorsed Pearl. With his drum tech Paul Jamieson, he designed the first modern drum rack, which Pearl subsequently and successfully marketed as the DR-1.

Jeff played maple shell Pearl kits (before the advent of the Masters and Reference Series) with a 22" kick and 10", 12", 13", 14" and 16" toms in standard depths. He used Remo Ambassadors on top and Ambassadors or Diplomats on the bottoms of his toms with a CS Coated on his snare.

As well as his rack, he had RIMS mounts and a DW5000 kick pedal. He also endorsed Paiste cymbals, starting with 2002s before gravitating to their Signatures, often favouring a large ride and China. Finally, Jeff played his own Performer Series Regal Tip stick, an un-lacquered 8A. **Geoff Nicholls**

Image: Courtesy of Pearl Drums

"LOCKING IN WITH JEFF WAS EFFORTLESS - HE WAS SO FLUID, ALMOST LIKE HE DIDN'T HAVE BONES!" - LELAND SKLAR

thing Jim Gordon used on 'Charlie Freak' on *Pretzel Logic* [Steely Dan]. The beat I used on [Boz Scaggs's] 'Lido Shuffle' is the same thing Gordon did, except at twice the tempo. There's no originality there. I think it's bad to clone yourself after someone, although I actually cloned myself after Jim Keltner when I was 17 and 18. I even thought it was cool to wear a vest and I copied his style. A drummer's own style comes from eventually being on his own, but I copied Gordon and Keltner and all these guys I dug. I remember realising this, but after a while, the accumulation of all the guys you copy hopefully becomes your own thing."

Around the time of the move to LA, Jimi Hendrix stirred his soul, followed shortly by John Bonham with Led Zeppelin. Porcaro was tasting a variety of drummers and feels from eclectic music, and his school friend Kerry Morris told me that he and Porcaro went to every concert they could, including Hendrix, Vanilla Fudge, the Buddy Miles Express (which inspired him to have a second drummer in an early band), Leon Russell, Herbie Hancock... And they even went through a fusion period going to see acts like Return to Forever and Weather Report.

He met and played with his hero, Jim Keltner, at the age of 17 for a Jack Daugherty project, and they became quick friends despite the difference in age. It was Keltner who hipped him to Purdie one day and played him the Platters' song 'With This Ring'. And then he got firm with Porcaro and told him in no uncertain terms: "'Don't listen to me. Listen to Jim Gordon. If you listen to me, you're never going to be the baddest guy on the planet. You gotta listen to Jim Gordon. You gotta listen to John Guerin and Paul Humphrey and these guys who are playing on records and killing everybody'. And he did. He started studying that. Every time I would go listen to John Guerin at Donte's jazz club, Jeff would be there."

Jeff would talk about the groove in other players – never himself. It would be all about the drummers like Greg Errico from Sly and the Family Stone or Bernard Purdie, Jim Keltner or Jim Gordon. He told me once how Errico influenced Toto's debut hit, 'Hold The Line': "The hi-hat is doing triplets, the snare drum is playing '2' and '4' backbeats, and the bass drum

is on '1' and the '&' of '2'. That eighth note on the second beat on the bass drum is an eighth-note triplet feel, pushed. That's basically the groove. When we did the tune, I said, 'Gee, this is going to be a heavy four-on-the-floor rocker, but we want a Sly groove'. That was David's (Paich) writing, the triplet groove of the tune. It was taking the Sly groove and meshing it with a harder rock caveman approach."

But before Toto even existed, there was Boz Scaggs, the inspiration for Toto. After recording two tracks with producer Joe Wissert on Helen Reddy's album *Music Music*, Wissert introduced Porcaro to Scaggs who was producing Les Dudek, former guitar player of the Allman Brothers. While working on the album, Porcaro suggested Paich, and the creativity snowballed onto Scaggs's own project, resulting in *Silk Degrees*, displaying some of Porcaro's greatest-feeling grooves.

"When we cut 'Lowdown', it was 1976 and there was an Earth, Wind & Fire album out that I had been playing over and over again," Porcaro revealed. "It might have been *I Am*, or the one before that. And instead of 16ths, whether it was Freddie or Maurice White, the groove was quarter-notes on the hi-hat and the same beat I just described. We wanted to get that kind of Earth, Wind & Fire medium dance groove rhythm section-wise. But instead of doing quarter notes, I did eighth notes, so if you take the figure I described and add eighth notes on the hi-hat, and every two bars or so opened the hi-hat on the last eighth note of the fourth beat, that's it. We cut it that way, with the hi-hat on the right, and that was the groove, but the producer said, 'Do you want to try adding 16th notes?' because disco was starting to come in around 1976... I wasn't the keenest guy on disco and said, 'Naw, naw, you don't want to do that, man. You don't want to ruin the groove'. He said, 'Just try it', and Paich and Boz said so too, so I sat down and overdubbed the hi-hat that they put on the opposite side. While I was overdubbing the simple 16ths, I started getting some accents and began answering the hi-hat stuff, and it got to be a lot of fun."

David Paich told me he never thought 'Lowdown' would be a hit, but believes it was because it grooved so heavily. The song was recorded in two takes and only because the record button wasn't hit on the first take!

Porcaro told me 'Love Me Tomorrow', also on *Silk Degrees*, was the most reggae he had heard up to that point in time: "Maybe the most up-to-date record that would tell you what I'm talking about would be 'Kid Charlemagne', but if you listen to the groove on that and on 'Haitian Divorce' from *The Royal Scam* (Steely Dan), that's Bernard Purdie. You'll hear some of the same kind of groove on the *Aretha Franklin and King Curtis Live At The Fillmore West* albums, both of which Bernard Purdie played on. On *King Curtis Live At The Fillmore West* when they do 'Memphis Soul Stew', you get a taste of this Bernard Purdie lope that I've heard a lot from Rick Marotta, too. My main influence for 'Love Me Tomorrow' was the Bernard Purdie kind of shuffling type lope, very reggaeish – but it's a bad imitation of Purdie," Porcaro said, adding that he played the timbales that were set up by the drums as well on that tune.

'Georgy Porgy' from Toto's debut album, *Toto*, had one of the deepest Porcaro grooves ever, and of course, when asked about it, he attributed it to a slew of other drummers: "'Georgy Porgy' is me imitating all the Maurice and Freddie White stuff (from Earth, Wind & Fire). It's imitating Paul Humphrey heavily; it's imitating Earl Palmer very heavily. When it comes to that groove, my biggest influences were Paul Humphrey, Ed Greene, Earl Palmer and the godfather of that 16th-note groove, James

Essential Jeff

Karl Brazil shares his favourite tracks from Jeff Porcaro's catalogue of hits...

'Rosanna'
Toto
'Calling Elvis'
Dire Straits
'Sweet Country Air'
Fools Gold
'Beat It'
Michael Jackson
'Lido Shuffle'
Boz Scaggs
'Ruby Baby'
Donald Fagen
'Sleeping With The Lights On'
Curtis Stigers
'New York Minute'
Don Henley
'You Might Need Somebody'
Randy Crawford
'Lady Love Me (One More Time)'
George Benson
'Running With The Night'
Lionel Richie
'Blues For Ronnie'
Karizma
'Lady To Love'
Leo Sayer
'Baby It's Me'
Diana Ross
'Cherish'
Madonna

Image: Lissa Wales

Image: Rick Malkin

Memories of Jeff...

Image: Alex Solca

STEVE LUKATHER

The guitar maestro on his and Jeff's special musical partnership

"Jeff was just born with this little something extra, and the room got brighter every time he walked into it. I met him when I was 15. His brother, Steve, was in my high school band along with Mike Landau and John Pierce, and Jeff and David Paich – who were with Steely Dan at that time – would come down and jam with us at our little gigs. They were magical cats, a real force together, and it made us realise how high the bar was set if you wanted to make it as a musician.

"Jeff and I became inseparable, and over the years we were hired together to do hundreds of sessions. He always brought out the best in everyone and made us all sound better. He was so good, and he *always* knew when a take was 'the one'.

"Jeff was the ultimate musician and everything and more that you could want a drummer to be. He had this endless supply of ideas, always about the groove, and there wasn't anything he couldn't play. He had his own technique, and there was a finesse to his playing with all those ghost notes and delicate touches. He really cared about everyone's music, too, and if you hired Jeff you knew that you were going to get a take, and you knew that it was going to be great.

"I think we are born with feel, and Jeff's natural groove simply felt better than most people's. He would listen to the click when we recorded, but he didn't want anyone else to – he wanted the group time to become the groove. When Dave [Paich] first brought in the beat for 'Rosanna' it was more of a Bo Diddley-type thing. Jeff didn't think it worked but told us that he had something else, so we started jamming on that famous groove... The song was written on the spot, and take two is the record. We never laboured over anything in Toto – if we did, the song wasn't right.

"It's funny, because Jeff would always be the first guy to arrive at rehearsals, and I'd walk up to the door and listen to this unbelievable soloing going on inside... He had the chops – he just didn't want to show them off!"

Gadson. That 'Georgy Porgy' groove I owe to them. It's the groove on 'Lowdown', just a different lift of it maybe, a different tempo. I stole all those grooves from those guys, but I may lay the beat just a little bit different, depending on the song."

For the Grammy Award-winning 'Rosanna', from *Toto IV*, it was all about "ripping off beats from Bernard Purdie and John Bonham", Porcaro said. "When I first heard David Paich play the tune, the Bo Diddley groove was very obvious. Because the tune was a shuffle feel, I felt that the half-time shuffle thing would feel the best. The tune also reminded me of the New Orleans-type second-line drumming. So the first listening of the tune brought forth all the old haunts from drummers to groups of that era that I had tapped from and stored away for this very moment."

'Pamela' from Toto's *The Seventh One* is one of those mid-tempo groove songs about which Porcaro told me he immediately thought about Stevie Wonder doing 'Sir Duke'. "That's a 'Sir Duke' groove," Porcaro said. "Bernard Purdie did that groove."

Image: Courtesy of Paiste

Porcaro could kill you with his ballad playing, too – Toto ballads like 'Anna', 'I'll Be Over You' and 'I Won't Hold You Back', as well as Leo Sayer's 'When I Need You', Joe Cocker's 'There Goes My Baby', Boz Scaggs's 'We're All Alone', and Michael Bolton's 'When A Man Loves A Woman', to name just a few. Barbra Streisand, arguably the greatest female vocalist of our time, hired him quite a bit – something of which Porcaro was very proud – and many of the songs were ballads. Take a listen to 'Some Good Things Never Last' from her 1988 album, *Til I Loved You*, and you will hear how Porcaro plays for the song, complementing with his beautiful fills.

In a 1988 interview I did with Porcaro, he explained his approach to ballad playing: "My ballad playing is me emulating Jim Keltner, and all I think about is Jim Keltner,

Memories of Jeff...

GARY KATZ

Steely Dan's legendary producer on Porcaro's famous groove and pocket

I got to know producer Gary Katz while working on my book, and it was clear how much love and respect for Porcaro he had: "Jeffrey was like my little brother". He hired him on whatever project he could if it made musical sense, including several Steely Dan projects, Donald Fagen's *Nightfly*, Joe Cocker's *Civilized Man*, Marc Jordan's *Mannequin*, *Trick or Treat* by Paul Brady and *Strange Kind of Love* by Love and Money.

While Katz admits Porcaro was not the "greatest technical drummer, he was my favorite drummer. He had a little skip in his beat that I loved".

Katz and Porcaro clicked from the first time they met, when Steely Dan guitar player Denny Dias suggested Porcaro come to Cherokee Ranch Studios late one night to rescue the *Pretzel Logic* track 'Night By Night'.

Porcaro ended up going on tour with Steely Dan after that record and then cut the entire following album, *Katy Lied*. But it's the title track from *Gaucho* that Katz says was Porcaro's greatest pride with Steely Dan – and Katz's favourite out of the tracks he produced.

Porcaro told me the pressure of working with them was nerve wracking, but he loved it: "That kind of pressure with those guys is cool because the music is the most prestigious music that's ever existed from my point of view, and it's great to hear, no matter what. Some people can't stand the perfection. In all honesty, I would have to say the Steely Dan tracks I've done are the most challenging as far as perfection goes, so I would say they're my personal favourite performances."

'Lowdown' is Katz's favorite Porcaro track produced by someone other than himself: "I don't know how you describe groove. It's where the beat lands," Katz ponders, acknowledging that Porcaro's was just a little bit behind. "Well, that's the only way we could play, and Purdie is a little bit further behind. It had to be behind. We didn't like on top – and I still don't like it – which became the fashion of the '80s. Just listen to 'Lowdown' and that's the groove."

Katz says when he and Porcaro worked together, they set up the drums so Porcaro did not have to turn his head to see Katz in the control room. "Every track Jeff played we looked at each other, and I know this will sound odd, but he waited for me to nod for a fill, not to tell him what to play but where to create the extra groove. I did that on almost every

Image: Joe Kohen/Getty Images for Kaylah Marlin

track we did. It was almost like a glove."

Katz says tracks for Joe Cocker's *Civilized Man* were recorded live: "Any musician, especially someone like Jeffrey, is always taken by and motivated by the quality of the people he is surrounded by – so when Joe was singing, Jeffrey was in heaven".

Katz, and many of the producers and artists I've spoken to over the years, talked about how involved Porcaro would become in a project – he didn't just play his part and leave. "He stayed until I left the studio," Katz says. "If there was something going on, he would say, 'Let me try that' or 'I can do that'. He would come to the studio and he would fall asleep on the couch in front of the console on occasion when he wasn't drawing – which was my second favourite thing he did. Donald (Fagen) said, 'You know, I like him sleeping on the couch better than I do the guys who come in and play'."

Image: Barney Hurley

"JEFF ALWAYS BROUGHT OUT THE BEST IN EVERYONE AND MADE US ALL SOUND BETTER." - STEVE LUKATHER

Jim Keltner, Jim Keltner. Since I was 16 years old, I've had a vivid picture of Jim Keltner sitting at a set of drums on my right. I think of relaxing the groove so that there's space. I like space in ballads. And sometimes I like those long, open fills I stole from Ringo Starr and Jim Keltner. Drummers have to be sensitive to the song, the dynamics. Toto's ballads happen to give you a lot of dynamics. You can get out there and still stay open."

Some of my personal favorite Porcaro performances come from the work he did with Michael McDonald – all of it, really, but two tracks off McDonald's debut solo record, *If That's What It Takes*, are particularly mention-worthy: 'I Keep Forgettin'' and 'That's Why'.

Of Porcaro, McDonald told me, "The whole idea of a shuffle and the typical rock 'n' roll drum pattern became different in his hands, more sophisticated and groovy. A hundred drummers could have played the same thing, but not that way".

It was well documented that Porcaro did not care for solos. His only interest was in keeping time. His godfather – Joe's friend since childhood – percussionist Emil Richards, said he often bothered him about improvising, but Porcaro would tell him all he wanted to do was be a timekeeper.

To Boz Scaggs he was so much more than that: "He did a lot more than just keep time. He actually moved me as a singer through the song. Everybody in the band would know what was coming up in the next few bars, because we could feel it in the way he anticipated, the way he moved us toward it, like a rider moves a horse".

I titled my book '*It's About Time*' because it was about time that there was a book on this drummer, this man we have missed for so long, and also because that's what he was about when he played his instrument. But it was really how Porcaro *felt* that time that set him apart from everybody else – that groove that I believe comes from inside each human differently; the magic of the individual heartbeat and soul.

Out Now!

Robyn Flans's book, *It's About Time: Jeff Porcaro, The Man And His Music* – featuring the author's own interviews with Jeff, plus stories, memories and tributes from a host of his fellow musicians and bandmates – is available now at hudsonmusic.com

Memories of Jeff...

VINNIE COLAIUTA

"When I first met Jeff at a studio in Santa Monica, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. The feel and depth of musicality was amazing. Then he walked out and I saw him outside. He said, 'Man, I can't play today', and I thought, 'What? Are you joking? That was awesome!' We became friends and he was an incredible human being. He was way above competition, he transcended it. Instead he embraced cooperation. We should all learn from that. What made him so good was his heart – he played music so well. Or, the music played him..."

MICKEY CURRY

"When I saw Jeff play with Steely Dan it truly changed my life – I was in total awe and found him so inspiring. What made him great was his aggressive but smooth approach – he played everything with such confidence and finesse – and I loved his feel and groove. He still gives me goosebumps and he never played a bad track. He was *the* man."

JIM KELTNER

"Jeffrey left the chops behind. All that technique I saw in him as a 17-year-old, I never saw that again. Ever. He transferred that passion into playing the perfect part for every situation, and to make the time and pocket exactly as he wanted. Perfect for him – *his* own perfection. He set incredibly high standards for himself and as he matured, he just surpassed everybody. I saw him in every musical situation and he was truly extraordinary."

STEVE SMITH

"When I first saw Jeff play, I was surprised at how effortless his playing was – he had a great touch and he got a big sound out of the drums without hitting them very hard. He had such great natural ability and could come up with the perfect drum part for a song almost instantly – and then he played those parts with the hippest feel imaginable!"

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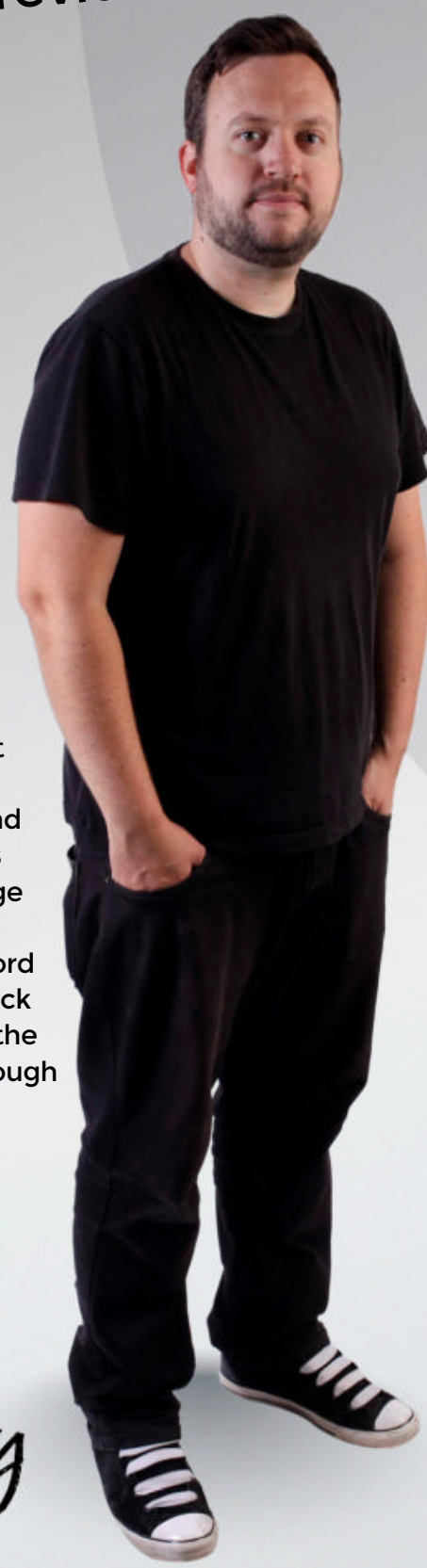


Roland VAD706 Kit **p76**

In this, the 300th issue of our beloved *Rhythm* magazine, we bring you everything you need to know about Roland's recently announced VAD706 e-kit. The surprise release of its latest flagship offering has caused quite a stir in the e-drumming community due to its full-size drum shells, upgraded module and, of course, the long-awaited digital hi-hats.

Elsewhere in the tech world, we're taking a look at Ableton's latest Live 11 software – putting the new 'tempo follow' function to the test and exploring ways that we as drummers can use the software to our advantage on stage or in the practice room.

And finally, if you're looking to record on a budget, then the Stage 4 Mic Pack from CAD Audio might be just what the doctor ordered. This set provides enough to record a four-piece kit for just £145.

Enjoy!

Tom Bradley

Rhythm Gear Editor

Meet Rhythm's Reviewers

Rhythm has been reviewing the gear drummers need for decades. Our team of expert reviewers have sat behind countless kits on stage and in the studio so you can rely on them to bring you the right verdict. Plus, we find out what groove makes them swing...

TOM BRADLEY

With an unquenchable thirst for new drum gear, Tom is perfectly placed to be *Rhythm*'s reviews editor. He's not only a longstanding member of our review team but also a lecturer at BIMM and a busy performing drummer. You may recognise Tom as the man behind the kit in many of the online gear videos on our YouTube channel.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE GROOVE?

"For me, the opening to Deftones's 'Digital Bath' is just absolute groove perfection."

MARK WHITLAM

Mark is a freelance musician who has played for varied artists, from Mercury Prize-nominee Eliza Carthy through to jazz and funk legend Pee Wee Ellis. He is currently one-quarter of ECM recording artist Iain Ballamy's new band, featuring pianist Jason Rebello. Mark is a senior lecturer at BIMM Institute Bristol, where he has taught for the last ten years.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE GROOVE?

"There is no single groove, but two I love are Zigaboo's classic 'Cissy Strut' and Gadd's two great grooves on Chick Corea's 'Lenore'."

Ableton Live 11
p82

Rhythm Verdict

The **RHYTHM RECOMMENDED** award is given to those products that score seven or eight out of ten. These are products that, although not quite scoring top marks, are strong products in their field.

The **RHYTHM STAR BUY** is awarded to those products that score nine or even ten out of ten for design, construction, function and value.

Rhythm Ratings

Here's what our ratings represent:

Poor: Sub-standard product	1 - 2
Average: Acceptable but uninspiring	3 - 4
Good: Above average	5 - 6
Excellent: Superior product	7 - 8
Outstanding: Impossible to fault	9 - 10

MATT FISHER

Matt has performed with some of the UK's most prominent musicians, such as Tina May, Jacqui Dankworth, Najma Akhtar and Steve Waterman. He has toured around the world working in a variety of styles, from jazz to world music. Matt teaches at Chichester University and is an examiner for Trinity College London.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE GROOVE?

"It has to be Steve Gadd's inventive groove on Paul Simon's track '50 Ways (To Leave Your Lover)'."

CAD Audio Stage 4 Mic Pack
p80

Roland VAD706 E-Kit

Roland launches a new flagship kit and its long-awaited digital hi-hats

Words: **Tom Bradley**

PRICE: £6,980

In 2016, Roland's flagship TD-50 module made USB-connected, digital drum pads a reality. Last year saw the release of the Japanese tech giant's V-Drums Acoustic Design (VAD) range, which incorporated its famous V-Drum technology into full-size drum shells for the first time. Combining these elements has resulted in the positively drool-worthy VAD706, which puts an upgraded TD-50X module alongside full-size mesh pads for a more realistic playing experience.

As if that wasn't enough, the 706 setup also incorporates brand-new 14" digital hi-hats, which promise to up the e-drumming game once again.

In terms of hardware, the new TD-50X module is identical to its predecessor with the exception of a couple of minor cosmetic changes – the key differences appear in the form of a significant upgrade to the software, including an entire reworking of the sample library which now boasts a total of 900+ sounds (more than double!)

These have been incorporated into 70 completely new kit presets created by Roland artists, with room for 30 custom creations. From 'Pure Wood' and 'Metal Dream' to 'TeknoFX' and 'Electro DnB', the TD-50X hosts the usual spread of natural acoustic samples and processed electronic sounds. Several new kits have been extensively sampled to allow multiple articulations for each drum and cymbal.

Unlike the TD-50 presets – which needed lots of user tweaking – the new module offers a much more satisfying experience straight out of the box. Some will find the kit presets somewhat hit-and-miss, but the level of customisation available means that a great kit sound is only a few button presses away.

The TD-50X offers additional effects and ambience templates, virtual microphone positioning and 32-channel audio via USB for multi-track recording (this was originally 10). Existing TD-50 users will be pleased to learn that they can unlock these new features with a software upgrade for a fee of €199 via the Roland Cloud service. It's worth noting, though, that original TD-50 kit presets cannot be used after updating due to the new sample library.

Almost Acoustic

The VAD706 comprises 10"x7", 12"x8" and 14"x14" toms, 22"x18" bass drum, 14" digital snare (PD-140DS), 18" digital ride cymbal pad (CY-18DR), two 16" crash cymbal pads (CY-16-RT) and the fabled 14" digital hi-hats (VH-14D).

The kit is also supplied with Roland's own boom/tom mount stands (times two) and a single boom cymbal stand – all of which use ball-joints for an easy setup. There's also a dedicated stand for mounting the module (PDS-20), due to the lack of rack system we'd typically find with a standard e-kit.

All of the supplied hardware is seriously heavy duty and feels reliably sturdy, much like you'd expect from any top-of-the-line acoustic hardware. It's worth noting that to complete the set, you'll still need to source

"IN PRACTICE, THE DYNAMIC RESPONSE FROM THE KIT IS QUITE FRANKLY STAGGERING."

They Say:

MICHAEL THOMAS
EUROPEAN DRUMS & PERCUSSION SPECIALIST

The digital hi-hats have been a long time in the making. What makes them so special?
"The digital hi-hats are very special! They have the same technology as the snare and ride cymbal, i.e., enhanced triggering capabilities, they're 14" (just like standard hats) and they feel great to play."

Aside from the digital pads, what are the main benefits of buying the VAD compared with an acoustic to electronic conversion?
"The main benefits are the looks and feel. We've put the triggers in the drums, ensured that the drums are less resonant (they're still electronic drums), and combined with the TD-50X module they feel like an acoustic kit."

Will you be releasing additional tom sizes?
"Currently we have just the 10", 12" and 14" toms available. They come in four different finishes: Gloss Cherry, Gloss Natural, Gloss Ebony and Pearl White. For any other sizes of toms, I'm afraid it's too early to tell."

What are your favourite features of the TD-50X module?
"There are so many! Some of my personal features are the 32 channels of audio over USB and the ability to control the room sound and the overhead microphones. Combine all of these and you can easily achieve a top-quality drum recording."

Rhythm STAR BUY

your own snare stand, hi-hat stand, bass drum pedal and drum throne.

Unlike last year's VAD506, which uses wrapped poplar shells, the new 706 shells featured use outer plies of maple finished in a choice of four gloss lacquers. Allowing the natural woodgrain to take centre-stage undoubtedly helps the 706 to feel more like an acoustic kit aesthetically, despite the maple shells being completely redundant in terms of tonality.

The four finishes available are Gloss Cherry, Pearl White, Gloss Natural and Gloss Ebony. We had the latter for review, and as you can see from the images, the shell is more of a dark grey shade than a deeper piano black, which again enhances the maple grain.

The toms each use three edge-mounted triggers, rather than the traditional centre trigger – not only making the drums more responsive to lower dynamics, but also eliminating 'hot spotting', which is sometimes an issue with centre-mounted triggers.

In practice, the dynamic response from the kit is quite frankly staggering. With little to no tweaking of settings, the tiniest whisper of a stroke through to full-on strikes played with anger are translated instantly into the desired musical outcome. This is particularly true of the digital pads and the multi-triggered toms. The most recent cymbal pads from Roland, such as the CY-16-RT crashes, are 40% thinner than previous models, which – combined with the larger size – affords them a little more flexibility.

The two rack toms use double-ply mesh heads, while the floor tom and snare drum use triple-ply for a more realistic feel. The KD-A22 attachment on the bass drum batter side houses a dense mesh playing surface (much like the KD-10, for those familiar), which has a remarkably realistic response under the beater.
The combination of the full-size drums and (nearly) full-size cymbals creates an impressive playing feel that enormously enhances the overall experience of the 706 kit.

1 2

3

1. Calf Skin Style
The vintage-style bass drumhead adds a touch of class and goes an extra step in giving the kit an acoustic aesthetic.

2. Time for an Upgrade
The new TD-50X features an entirely new sample library boasting more than 900 sounds. TD-50 users can pay to upgrade to the TD-50X spec.

3. Going Digital
The long-awaited VH-14D hi-hats bring a much higher level of control and expression to the table.

4. Size Matters
The combination of the full-size drums and cymbals go a long way to improving the realism of playing V-Drums.

5. Heavy Duty
Roland's new DTS30S hardware set features combination tom and cymbal boom stands and a dedicated stand for mounting the module.

6. A Choice of Flavours
The VAD706 shells feature outer plies of maple finished in a gloss lacquer. The four finishes available are Gloss Cherry, Pearl White, Gloss Natural and Gloss Ebony.

7. Any Port in a Storm
Connectivity is the same except now there's a use for that elusive third USB input. The update also allows for 32-channel USB audio to a computer.

4

5

6 7

Roland VAD706 E-Kit

"ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING THINGS TO COME OUT OF THE RELEASE OF THE 706 IS THE NEW VH-14D DIGITAL HI-HATS."

The TD-50X Family

There are a total of three kit configurations based around the latest TD-50X module, with the VAD706 sitting firmly at the top in terms of price point. Both of the rack-based TD-50K2 (£4,832) and TD-50KV2 (£6,712) models come complete with the full trio of digital pads, although some substitutions have been made elsewhere to increase the overall affordability.

In short, the K2 setup features a 14" kick pad, three 10" tom pads and replaces one of the 16" cymbal pads with a 14". The beefier KV2 uses a two-up, two-down configuration, with two heavier-duty 10" rack tom pads and two 12" floor tom pads, plus a an 18" acoustic-style bass drum.

Digital Hi-Hats

Arguably one of the most exciting things to come out of the release of the 706 is the new VH-14D digital hi-hats. TD-50 users (and more recently, TD-27) have been waiting patiently for five years to use the mystical third USB trigger input and will understandably be elated by the recent release.

Using a similar design to the previous VH-13 model, the bottom pad acts as the controller and connects to its counterpart via two short jack cables. Much like the ride pad, the digital capabilities allow better positional sensing, a higher level of sensitivity (including a touch-sensitive surface) and generally more accuracy in interpreting player input.

Hi-hats have always been the Achilles heel of electronic drumming, due to the myriad sounds they can produce, but Roland's digital pads deliver exactly as promised – bringing us a giant step closer to the real deal.

It's unknown exactly how many individual samples there are from tightly closed to wide open, but transitions feel fantastically smooth and natural across the board. Even foot splashes become a joy to play and don't result in strange mis-triggering, which has often been the case before. The positional sensing on the bow of the cymbal works well although, surprisingly, there is no separate bell trigger. The VH-14D hats are available separately for £626 and will work with the TD-50X, TD-50 and TD-27 modules provided they are on the latest firmware.

CONTACT
www.roland.com

Verdict

This rugged and stage-worthy kit looks the absolute business. By combining full-size playing surfaces with its most powerful module yet, Roland's new flagship kit once again takes e-drumming to the next level.

Rhythm Rating

9/10

CAD Audio
Stage 4 Drum Mic Pack

Here is a wallet-friendly solution for players starting to record themselves at home

Words: **Mark Whitlam**

PRICE: £145.00

Let's get this out the way from the get-go: a set of drum mics costing around the same price as one industry standard bass drum mic is not going to be appealing to drummers and engineers expecting audiophile results. What CAD have presented, however, is a highly inexpensive solution for the budget-conscious player who may be starting to record themselves at home or in live situations (let's be optimistic) when pub and local club gigs come back on the radar.

Similarly, this set may be a neat solution for schools who are looking to mic up their drumset in lessons. This particular set is intended for a one-up, one-down tom configuration with a dedicated snare and bass drum mic. CAD also make a Stage 7 set that includes a pair of overheads and a third tom mic, should you need an all-in-one solution.

Ain't no Mounting High Enough

Each mic is fairly lightweight due to the plastic housing yet feels pretty ruggedly put together, with a simple mounting system for the snare and tom mics. The physical size of the grille is rather large compared to something like the stalwart SM57, which could make positioning (of the snare mic in particular) something of a challenge, given the limited real estate around a set of drums.

The clip mounts directly to the rim of the tom by means of a simple screw-clamp design. Clearly, the more direct contact you have with the drum, the more undesirable vibrations are going to get transmitted to the housing of the mic, which can colour the primary sound source of the drumhead – not least low-end rumble – but more on this later.

Positioning can be tailored, to some degree, by the two pivot points. The mid-section 'arm' has a cut-out allowing for around an inch of linear extension in either height, forward-backward positioning or an angle in between, depending on how you use it. This gives a fairly decent range of locations from which to choose, but falls a bit short for the greater variety of snare drum mic positions one may want.

The limitation here is two-fold: firstly, how far back towards the edge of the rim you can place it, and secondly, in terms of height. The combined height of the clamp and vertical mount is around 5cm, so anyone wanting a low and more horizontal position – looking across the head, rather than angled down towards it – is going to be disappointed.

What's the Frequency, Kenneth?

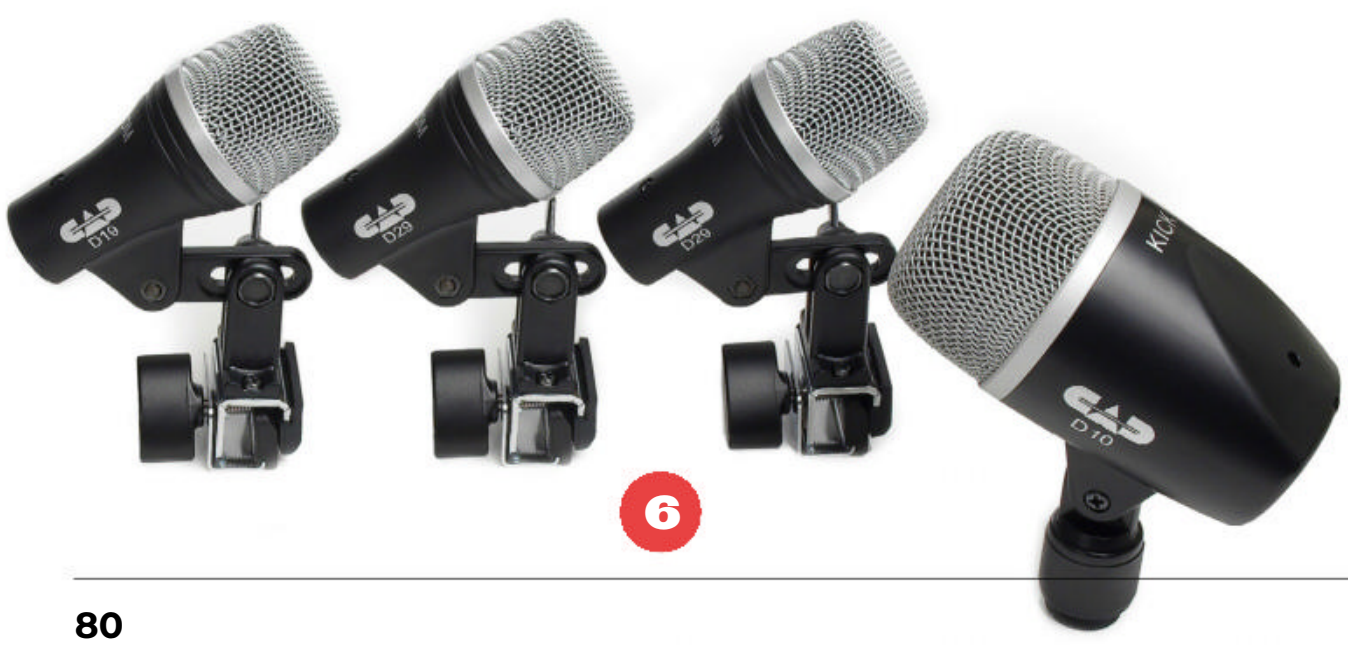
As mentioned earlier, these mics come pre-EQ'd. The tom and snare mics have a low-frequency roll-off from around 150Hz to try and combat any unwanted vibrations resulting from direct-to-drum mounting. This could be something of an issue if you prefer to get some real lows out of your floor tom, so judicious EQ-ing on your desk or in your DAW is likely to be required if that is what you want.

We are informed that the D10 bass drum mic has been designed to enhance "the 'thump', 'crack' and 'click' while reducing 'boxinesss'," pointing to an EQ profile benefitting the characteristics we desire in a standard rock/pop bass drum tone.

This claim is something of a surprise looking at the frequency response graph. For example, the go-to frequency we boost to some degree is around 60Hz, where the meatiness of our low end is found. In contrast, the D10 has a significant (10dB) boost around 100Hz (which can be a real danger zone for some kicks) and a steep cut so that the 60Hz sweet spot is actually flat.

There are a number of erratic boosts in the higher frequencies, which we associated with the attack of the beater required for pop, rock and metal genres. In practice, this translates as expected. The bass drum mic does provide some low end, but it veers towards a more guttural result than a beefy punch in the sternum. Clearly, this can be tailored somewhat

"THE SNARE MIC IS PROBABLY THE STAR PLAYER IN THIS SET, WITH A FAIRLY OPEN TOP END, THANKS TO THE PRE-EQ'D 4-10KHZ BOOST."



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using EQ on your mixing desk or DAW. It does, however, provide some clarity as the beater strikes the head.

All mics are cardioid pickup patterns, except the snare mic where they have opted for a supercardioid design – the rationale here being it has a narrow pickup angle in an attempt to reduce hi-hat bleed. Both snare and tom mics produce a fairly present stick attack, but any extra meat you may want will have to come from EQ-ing them.

The snare mic is probably the star player in this set, which has a fairly open top end, thanks to pre-voiced boost in the 4-10kHz region.

CONTACT
www.jhs.co.uk

1. Clip-on Design
Simply attach to your rim and you're away. Only the bass drum mic needs an external stand.

2. Specific Snare Mic
The side-rejection of this mic is greater to avoid hi-hat bleed due to the supercardioid pick-up pattern.

3. Ready EQ'd for the Bass Drum
Frequency boosts and cuts have been pre-loaded into this mic, which are claimed to tailor it to the bass drum.

4. In your Grille
The family large grille headpiece could make snare positioning tricky.

5. Getting a New Angle on Things
The variable arm length along with two hinged points allows for a decent range of positioning.

6. Box Set
The four mics fit snuggly in foam-padded cut-outs inside this lunchbox-sized hard plastic case.

Verdict

A decent starter set for budget-conscious drummers looking to record themselves at home or in live situations.

Rhythm Rating

6/10

Ableton Live 11

Ableton add some spectacular features to its already impressive Live software

Words: **Tom Bradley**

PRICE: Price: £69 (Intro); £319 (Standard); £535 (Suite)

Take a peek side of stage at any stadium-filling pop acts and there's a fair chance that somewhere you'll find a laptop running Ableton Live. The likes of Joe Clegg (Ellie Goulding) and Adam Marcello (Katy Perry) both demonstrate perfectly how powerful the combination of acoustic and electronic instruments can be in a live setting.

There's nothing to say that using a laptop as part of a hybrid setup need be exclusive to Top 40 artists though, as this type of setup continues to become more of a reality for drummers of all levels. Twenty years on from the release of its original Ableton Live software, we're taking a look at the 11th incarnation of the German company's famous DAW: Ableton Live 11.

For those of you unfamiliar with Ableton, let's take a quick look at the general design and some of the reasons it's become so widely used, particularly by drummers.

Initially, what sets Live apart is the default Session View, which, due to its grid-based system, allows easy management of audio or MIDI information. Ideal for sampling or triggering loops, dropping an audio file into the grid will create a 'clip' that automatically syncs to the project tempo. This automatic 'warping' process tends to work better with shorter audio files, but with a little tinkering, full-length tracks can also be synced (it helps if you know the original tempo).

Once the audio transients have been lined up with the rhythmic grid, choosing

a start and end point for a loop is as easy as dragging a couple of markers into place. With the clip set to loop, these markers can be moved effortlessly to alter the length of each loop.

Within the Session View, hitting play at the end of a row or 'scene' will simultaneously trigger any clip within it, making it a doddle to switch between individual or even multiple loops at once. Programming a different starting tempo or time signature for each scene has been made easier within Live 11, now just dragging the cursor to change the values.

Live also offers an Arrangement View option which uses a more typical timeline approach – better suited for writing tracks or recording takes. The latest version now offers a comping option that allows multiple takes for a single instrument – the best part of each take can then be chosen to create the perfect overall take.

"AS A CONCEPT, 'TEMPO FOLLOW' BLURS THE LINES OF MUSICIANS 'FOLLOWING THE CLICK' AND ALMOST FLIPS THIS RELATIONSHIP ON ITS HEAD."

This won't be mind-blowing news for Pro Tools or Logic users, but it's another string to Ableton's bow, which helps make it an incredibly versatile DAW for both live performance and studio use. The comping feature also works for MIDI instruments, which is great news for those using electronic drums to trigger sounds in Live.

Setting up an external MIDI controller can often be a cumbersome process, but it's made stress-free by Ableton's 'map' function. First select the parameter to be controlled and hit the pad, button, dial or fader that you want to control it with. Armed with our trusty Roland SPD-SX, we were able to trigger various clips with each pad and even use the FX dials to control channel volumes or effects within Ableton.

The two marry together perfectly and allow us to get the usual functionality of the sample pad plus considerably more. The pads can be mapped to almost any function including cursor keys – allowing navigation through scenes without even touching the laptop. Using a drum rack raises the game even further and allows access to hundreds of included samples, which can easily be switched around or edited with effects.

The all-bells-and-whistles Suite edition is supplied with an enormous amount of drum racks and other samples, MIDI instruments, MIDI clips, effects and other devices. This now includes Upright Piano, String Quartet and Brass Quartet packs developed with Spitfire Audio, in addition to Hybrid Reverb, Spectral Resonator, Spectral Time effects – plus a lot more.

One of the most noteworthy additions for Live 11 is the 'tempo follow' function. As the name suggests, this clever algorithm allows the software to follow tempo fluctuations from any external audio source. This is primarily designed to follow percussive instruments, but we were pleasantly surprised by how capable it was at following songs.

In practice, 'tempo follow' performs as advertised and is hard to fault. As a concept, this functionality blurs the lines of musicians 'following the click' and almost flips this relationship on its head. In reality, the best way to look at it seems to be that it's a meet-in-the-middle type arrangement – allowing organic push and pull within performance of sequenced material or electronic instruments working to a grid. Using a separate mic positioned within the centre of the kit works well for acoustic drums (primarily to pick up the kick, snare and toms), but when using Superior Drummer with our e-kit, the work-around is to feed in the original audio from the module as the follow source.

Live is available for Mac and Windows and comes in Intro (£69), Standard (£319) and Suite (£535) editions. There's also a 90-day free trial with no limitation to features, so it's worth trying it out for yourself.

1. Follow Me
Live's 'tempo follow' function uses an algorithm to follow an external audio source.

2. Choked Up
MIDI aftertouch now works within Ableton, which is great news for e-drummers using VST software.

3. Cello? You've got yourself a Bass
Spitfire Audio packs include upright piano, brass quartet and string quartet.

4. Feeling Triggered
A sample pad makes the perfect MIDI controller for Ableton Live's drum racks.

5. Take it Away
The new comping function allows easy editing of multiple recorded takes.

6. Processing Power
An upgraded CPU monitor displays current or average usage and performance impact on each track.

CONTACT
www.ableton.com

Verdict

We've barely scratched the surface of what Live 11 is capable of, which seems vast. In addition to ticking all the boxes in the DAW category, it's almost become an instrument in its own right.

Rhythm Rating

10/10

Beats working

Every drummer needs Rhythm. Exclusive lessons from our expert team...

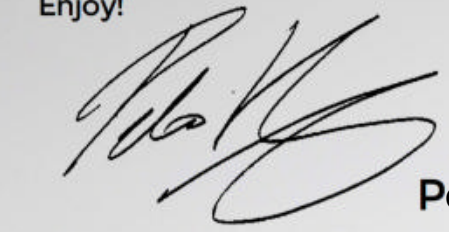
Welcome to Beats Working, the part of the magazine aimed at helping drummers of all abilities to develop and progress.

Kicking things off this issue, Colin, Erik and I are looking at linear drumming with three different approaches to this unique way of playing in 'Getting Started', 'Creative Concepts' and 'Technical Difficulties', respectively.

Next, in 'Four-Piece-Fills' Jason Bowld shows how different concepts can be combined to create new and interesting phrases, while in 'Percussion Toolbox', all-round percussion guru Pete Lockett presents Part 2 of his look at some essential bongo rhythms and techniques. E-kit expert Tom Bradley explores the best ways to run full-length audio files with a dedicated click track in his hybrid column.

Finally, Mike Sturgis takes a look at the more cerebral aspects of this issue's theme of groove and feel.

Enjoy!



Pete Riley, Beats Working Editor

Introducing our expert tutors (and what their favourite groove is).

PETE RILEY

In his 35 years of playing, Pete has recorded and toured with a wide range of artists from Guthrie Govan to Keith Emerson (ELP). He's also been active in the world of education for many years, started writing for *Rhythm* in '93, has been teaching at ACM for some 21 years and more recently at WaterBear in Brighton.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE GROOVE?

"'So You Say' from John Scofield's *Blue Matter*, Dennis Chambers on drums. It's syncopated with two groups of 7/16th notes in 4/4 which doesn't shout groove, but in the hands of Mr Chambers...."

JASON BOWLD

Jase has been the drummer for Welsh rock/metal titans Bullet For My Valentine since 2015. He began drumming aged 12 and turned professional at 21. He joined UK industrial legends Pitchshifter from 1999 to 2007, during which time his session drumming career took shape. He's played with Killing Joke, Pop Will Eat Itself, Fightstar and even Bill Bailey.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE GROOVE?

"I'm loving Ben Thatcher's solid 4/4 vibe on 'Oblivion' from the new Royal Blood album, *Typhoons* – he lets the riffs speak whilst keeping a good basic foundation."

ERIK STAMS

Born and raised in NYC, Erik has over 20 years of performing, recording, television, film and teaching experience. He's performed and recorded with artists including Jamie Lawson, Zervas and Pepper, Butch Thomas, Jon Langford, The Glyndebourne Touring Opera and The Darling Buds. He is head of drums at BIMM London.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE GROOVE?

"That is a very difficult question... I'm going to have to go with 'Kissing My Love' by Bill Withers – James Gadson on drums. Loose, greasy and soooo funky."

PETE LOCKETT

Pete is one of the most versatile multi-percussionists on the planet and has played a dizzying range of instruments with artists including Björk, Peter Gabriel, Robert Plant, Michael Nyman, and the Pet Shop Boys; and on a plethora of Hollywood films. He continues to tour worldwide as a soloist, collaborator and educator.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE GROOVE?

"Steve Gadd's '50 Ways...' groove. A completely unique and innovative approach from the man who single-handedly changed the direction of drum set playing forever."

MIKE STURGIS

A 15-year veteran of writing for *Rhythm* magazine, Mike has appeared live and on record with artists including A-ha, Steve Winwood, Jack Bruce, David Bowie, Elton John, Tom Jones, Bob James, Asia, Beverly Knight and many more. He plays with Redtenbacher's Funkestra and The Staks and is head of education for DIME Online.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE GROOVE?

"For me, it's the King Kong groove (and all its variations) as defined by David Garibaldi. King Kong is a concept that DG uses to build many funky grooves!"

COLIN WOOLWAY

Colin has been playing and teaching drums professionally since 1976. He has done every kind of gig including eight years with rock icon Suzi Quatro. He is the founder of the Drumsense teaching programme and has written for *Rhythm* for over 20 years! Colin teaches at studios in Twickenham, The Brit School and ELAM.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE GROOVE?

"I love playing straightahead rock 'n' roll, and I love the Texas shuffle – but when Bob Marley's 'Could You Be Loved' gets cooking, the hairs on the back of my neck stand up!"

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For the featured tuition videos go to www.youtube.com/c/RhythmMagazine

Getting Started

Colin Woolway gets linear with beginner grooves in 3 and 5

Hello everyone once again, and welcome to another of my 'Getting Started' articles! This issue we are looking at the 'linear' style of playing – where no notes come together – applied to grooves and also to fills. If you haven't tried this yet, I guarantee this lesson will be a great starting point.

We'll 'get started' with simple groupings of 3 and 5, each subdivision punctuated with a bass drum note.

Ex 1 shows us eight notes, the bass drum punctuating the 3 and the 5. Ex 2 applies these groupings to the hi-hats and snare drum, creating a 16th-feel groove – try and lean into the bass drum and the backbeat, as indicated by the accents.

Here in Ex 3, a lot of fun can be had by reassigning the notes – in this instance, simply pick your right stick up and place it on the ride cymbal and continue playing as before. In Ex 4, let's move it around the kit. Try it as a fill with the groove from Ex 3.

For Colin's video lesson go to www.youtube.com/c/RhythmMagazine

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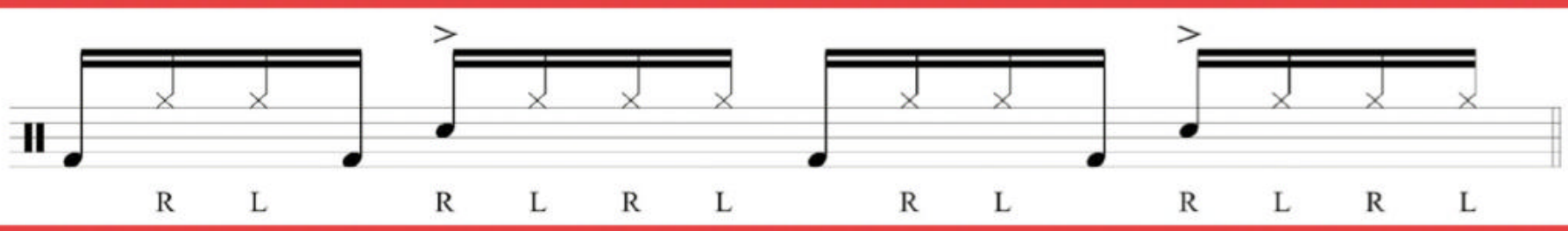

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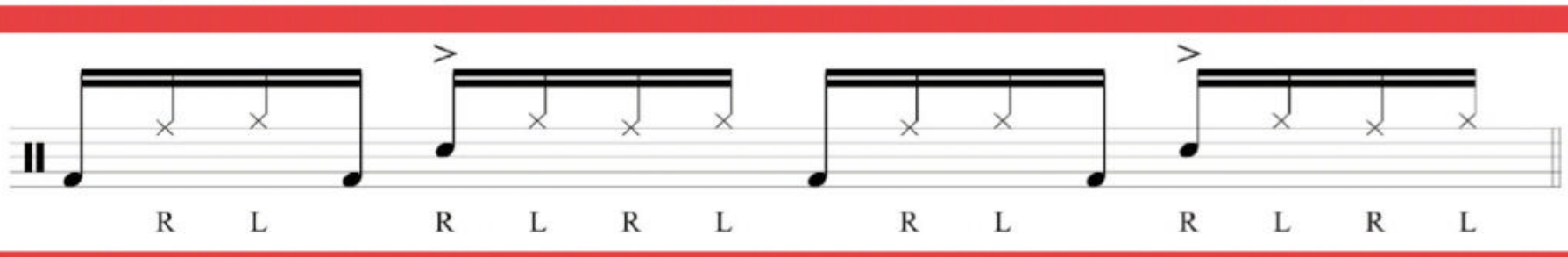

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4 PRACTICE CHALLENGE

Taking the concept of reassigning the notes a little further, let's expand our groove by including the toms. Check the video on *Rhythm*'s YouTube channel for some cool examples!

Creative Concepts

Erik Stams explores how to texture your grooves using linear fragments

Linear phrasing involves the articulation and orchestration of each note of a rhythm, groove or fill with a different limb or on a separate voice of the drum kit. This is in contrast with the 'layered' approach we normally take when playing beats, where the bass drum/hi-hat or snare drum/hi-hat fall in unison.

A useful analogy would be to compare a linear phrase to an arpeggio, which is played one note at a time, rather than a chord where notes are played in a cluster. In this lesson, we will focus on a single four-note sticking pattern – R L L F. Keep in mind that this concept could be applied to a multitude of sticking patterns.

A key element in making any musical phrase sound expressive is to introduce dynamics and articulation. By playing some notes quietly and some notes loudly we can bring our musical ideas to life.

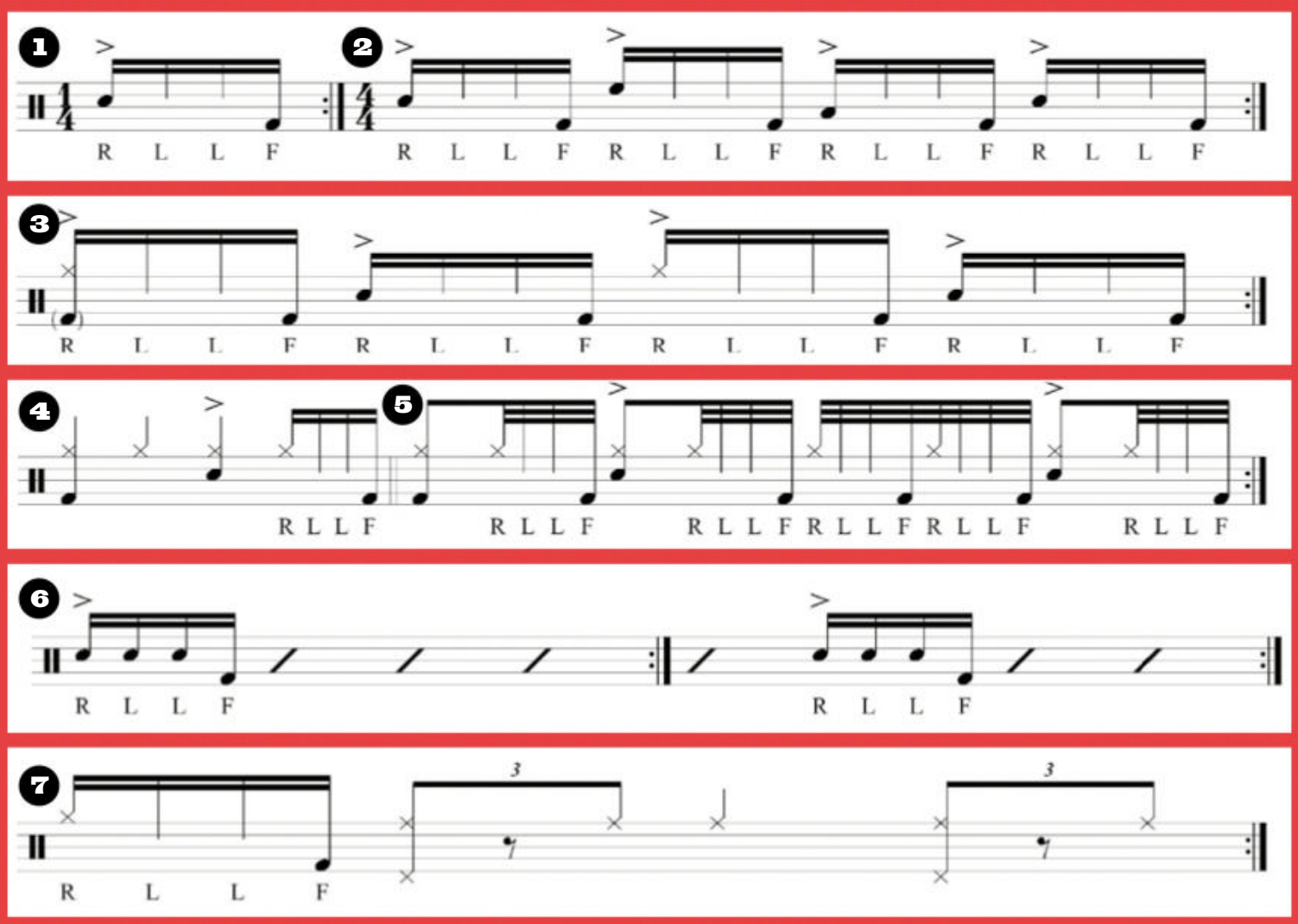
In the case of this R l l F sticking, try playing the right-hand notes as accents and the left-hand notes as ghost notes (Ex 1). Reverse this for left-handed drummers (L r r F). Practice with a metronome, and make sure that each note is even in length and placement despite the dynamic variation – 65bpm is a good starting tempo.

For Erik's video lesson go to
www.youtube.com/c/RhythmMagazine

Now try orchestrating the right-hand notes around the kit (Ex 2). Try using this phrase as a 'fill' in context with a groove. Ex 3 puts this sticking into a groove setting. The right hand moves back and forth between the hi-hat and snare drum while the left hand plays ghost notes on the snare drum. Try adding the bass drum on beat one as well.

Exs 4 and 5 illustrate how to incorporate this sticking into a groove as an embellishment, Steve Gadd style. Check out 'Chuck E's In Love' by Rickie Lee Jones – different sticking, same concept. Explore playing this phrase in context with a groove using different placements within the bar (Ex 6).

Ex 7 demonstrates how this sticking can be played in other musical contexts, in this case, jazz. Try all of the previous placement exercises in context with a jazz ostinato.



Heads up

Dynamics
In music, the dynamics of a piece is the variation in loudness between notes or phrases.

EXAMPLE NOTES
1. A four-note linear sticking.
2. Orchestrate the right-hand notes around the kit.
3. In a groove context.
4. As an embellishment within a groove.
5. As an embellishment within a groove using 32nd notes.
6. Explore different placements within the bar.
7. In context with a jazz ostinato – explore all previous placements.

Technical Difficulties

Pete Riley's pro-level take on linear drumming with 4-over-3 linear grooves

Linear drumming, with its idea of avoiding two sounds falling simultaneously, means the bass drum or stepped hi-hats can be combined with the hands to create an interesting alternative to single strokes or time playing where the right hand plays a steady rhythm.

It's probably worth not being overly concerned about two limbs potentially falling together, as in fact it's the combination of the two approaches that can make linear playing so useful in creating fills and grooves.

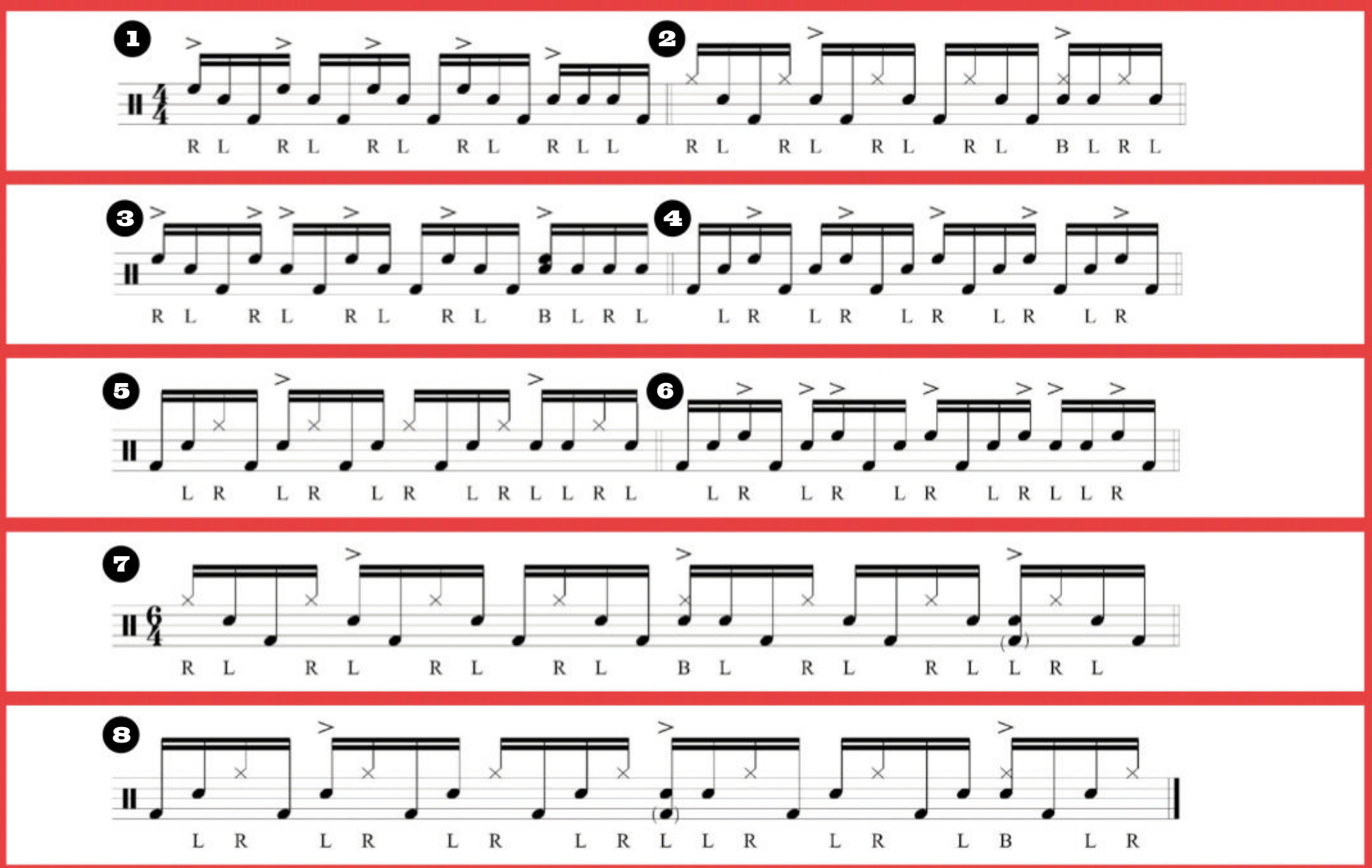
One of the most frequently encountered combinations in linear drumming is the three-note grouping of right/left/foot, or R L K. The following examples here utilise this and its related combination of K L R to create a selection of ideas.

You may recognise these figures from more familiar hand/foot triplet combinations, however one of the crucial ingredients here – and in a lot of linear playing – is the use of ghost notes (in this case in the left hand).

This use of 'internal dynamics' is what ties the patterns together whilst conveying and maintaining an underlying 16th-note flow. In fact, it's the consistency of that flow that is one of the most challenging aspects of playing linear patterns, as – unlike playing 16th notes between the hands using single strokes – breaking the 16th notes up between the different limbs can make them much harder to play smoothly.

In Ex 1, our R L K combination is used to play a fill. Next, in Ex 2, it's in a kick/snare/hat context to create a groove. And in Ex 3, the two previous approaches are combined to give us a fill that maintains a backbeat. Exs 4 to 6 use this same process but using the K L R combination.

Finally, in Exs 7 and 8, we expand on the previous ideas by keeping the combination going until they resolve back to the downbeat. This takes six beats, so the examples are in 6/4 and feature three backbeats on beats 2, 4 and 6, respectively.



rockschool®

Four-Piece Fills

Jason Bowld shows you how to create powerful fills with combined concepts

Image: Ryan Chang

For Jason's video lesson go to
www.youtube.com/c/RhythmMagazine

Getting used to playing in a linear style fluently takes time, as does utilising rudiments in fills.

Once you've mastered these skills, the task of creating something original and musical presents another challenge, so in this lesson, we're going to combat this by combining concepts!

The following three examples all feature various rudimentary sticking patterns combined with linear phrases that I have 'shaped' to create some musical fills. They're all preceded by the same groove and are, of course, designed with the four-piece setup in mind.

After three bars of half-time grooving, Ex 1 shows a 16th-note fill that starts with the makings of an inverted six-stroke roll but is interrupted by a kick double. A powerful right-left follows on the floor tom and snare, and the fill is finished with a full inverted six-stroke roll. Welcome to the unpredictable world of linear – populated with rudiments!

Ex 2 continues the feel of its predecessor with a fill twice as long, and the accented toms are used intelligently to create a musical sound.

Ex 3 switches the groove to the ride for a couple of bars before the two-bar fill. This time, the rudiments are further fragmented to create more punchy accents within their linear landscape.

Heads up

Shaped

It's very easy to fall into the trap of repeating phrases in a fill because they feel comfortable! To create musical fills, I shape them by 'singing' them and using linear/rudimentary phrases to musically mould them.

1

It's crucial to start slowly with these fills, and this short one-bar fill is a great starting point. Use a slow tempo to become familiar, and feel comfortable with the phrases and accents inside the bar. Over-exaggerate your movements, and feel each double that you play with your hands and foot to really embed the movement into your muscle memory.

2

If you've mastered the fill in Ex 1, the fill in bar three should come quickly, as it starts almost the same and continues into bar four using similar phrases and fragments that are displaced musically.

3

Starting on the ride now in the preliminary groove, the fill once again starts in the usual way, but 'holds' on some nice syncopated mid-tom accents that exploit the R L L K sticking before finishing with powerful single strokes around the kit.

Percussion Toolbox

Pete Lockett explores the different tones and strokes that can be used on this most versatile of percussion instruments

In the last issue, we looked at the open treble tone on the smaller bongo and the lower tone stroke on the lower bongo. This time we will do a whistle stop tour of a few other tones and muting techniques, starting out with the 'slap' stroke.

The slap stroke is the sharp cutting sound we also find in conga and djembe technique. It is a difficult stroke to explain with the written word, and I would strongly recommend that you refer to the video for this lesson on the *Rhythm* YouTube channel.

To explain it simply, you cup the hand and 'grab'. After you have struck the head of the bongo, you leave the fingertips on the head for a millisecond and grab slightly, like you were pulling some string towards yourself.

It is not a stroke that necessarily needs to be played loudly or forcefully. When it is played correctly, it 'pops' and stands out distinctly from the other strokes. There is also an open version of the slap stroke where the hand does not remain on the head after striking, but we will just use the closed one for this article.

FIG 1 – SLAP STROKE

1 This next rhythm incorporates the slap and is subdivided 3/3/2 in 2/4. The hand pattern is simple: R L R L R L R L.

Now the rhythm gets subdivided 2/3/3 in 2/4.

2

Let's get into some more involved strokes and mutes on bongos. The basic rhythm we will be aiming for is called *martillo*, which means 'the hammer' in Spanish. This involves muting the smaller drum with the fingertips and thumb whilst striking. To begin with, we will play just the muting sequence on the smaller drum and then add in the larger drum later.

As in the notation in Ex 3, we start the pattern from the preceding 16th note (because the first actual beat of the bar with the right hand is muted by the preceding left-hand stroke). This first stroke of our sequence is played with the side of the thumb of the left hand and remains on the head after striking. The fingertips on your left hand should be away from the head.

FIG 2 – THUMB MUTE

Then, with the thumb muting the drum, strike the edge of the head with the right-hand fingertips.

For Pete's video lesson go to
www.youtube.com/c/RhythmMagazine

FIG 3 - THUMB MUTE & FINGERTIP STRIKE

This is followed by the left-hand fingertips coming down nearer the outside edge of the head.

FIG 4 - FINGERS MUTE

Then, with the left-hand fingertips gently muting the drum, the right-hand fingertips strike the nearside edge of the drum once more.

FIG 5 - FINGERS MUTE & FINGERTIP STRIKE

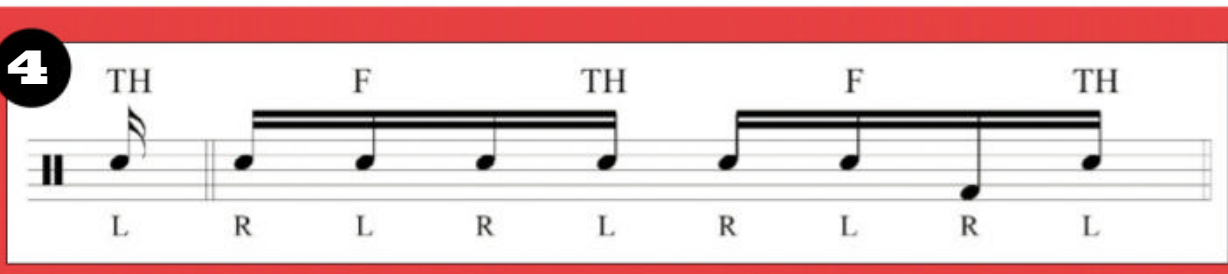
We are now back at the beginning of the sequence where the outside edge of the left-hand thumb is brought down onto the head again. Here, we see this fully notated in Ex 3. The right hand is striking on the beat and the left-hand strokes are all on the up beat.

3

FIG 6 – BASS TONE FOUR FINGERS

Next, we will add in the bass tone on the larger drum. Over a bar of 2/4, this will sound on the fourth eighth note, as in Ex 4. This is now actually the complete basic martillo rhythm.

4

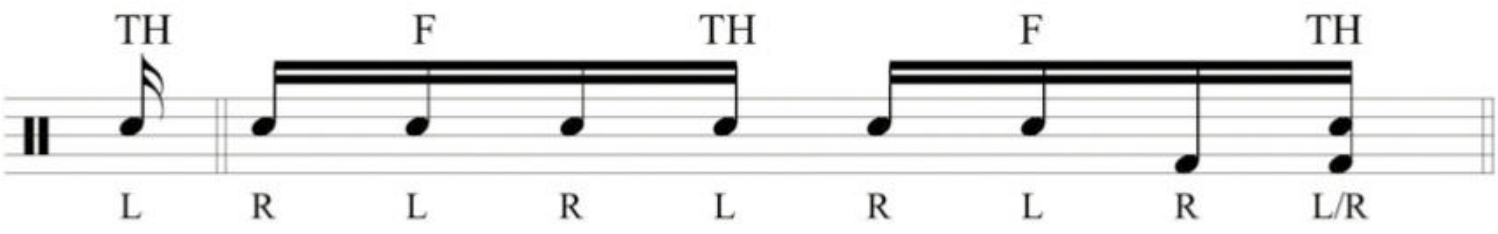


Now we will add an offbeat accented open tone with the left hand on the last 16th note of the bar. This interferes somewhat with the left-hand sequence of thumb and fingertip and takes a little while to get this off beat open accent into the flow naturally.

5

Finally, we will go back to the full martillo from Ex 4. This time though, we will add a second open tone on the low drum on the last 16th note of the bar. This will be simultaneously played along with the left-hand thumb stroke muting the smaller drum. This one is a little bit of a brainteaser. It's a cool rhythm, though, and one that echoes the feel and groove of patterns commonly played on the congas. Generally, this groove works a little better at slower tempos.

6



In summary, this is a really brief guide to get started on bongos. The complexity is too much to go into in any depth in so few words. Suffice to say, they are absolutely one of my fave instruments and pretty much go everywhere I go (apart from to Fratton Park!)

So, You Want to Play Hybrid?

Route your click track to a separate output for more control on stage says **Tom Bradley**

If your module has the ability to import custom audio samples, then it's likely that it can be used to play back full songs. In this lesson, we'll be looking at how to run full-length audio files with a dedicated click track – both played back in sync but routed to separate outputs.

This is an ideal solution for running backing tracks on stage, sending the track to front of house and the click to your in-ear monitor (or even the whole band). A dedicated sample pad such as the Roland SPD-SX lends itself perfectly to this task, but it's worth noting that higher-end e-drum modules have also supported this functionality for a few years now.

We start by importing our audio. In the case of the SPD-SX, this can be done either by connecting it to a computer or inserting a USB stick into the device and copying to the internal memory. If you're creating your own tracks within a DAW, it is imperative that both audio files are of an equal length when exporting. This usually results in having a few seconds of silence at the beginning of a track in place of the count-in.

Once the audio is ready to go, assign the backing track to your preferred pad and the click track to another. Next, we'll need to link the two pads in order for both of them to trigger simultaneously, regardless of which one is struck. Don't forget to turn 'Dynamics' off so that the audio always plays at full volume. In the SPD-SX, the pads can be paired within the 'Kit' menu under the 'Pad Link' setting.

Now you should have your track and click running in perfect sync though the master output. To send the click track to a separate destination, first head to the 'Kit' menu and select the 'Output' tab. Choose the pad that you assigned your click audio to, and choose the output destination that works best for you. On the accompanying video, I'm simply using the headphone output for my in-ear monitors.

Watch Tom's lesson now at www.youtube.com/c/RhythmMagazine

Tech Talk

Signal Routing
Audio sources can be routed to 'Master', 'Sub Outs' or 'Phones Only'. There are a multitude of applications for this functionality, particularly onstage. As an example, you could run drum samples to master, backing tracks to sub outs and click to headphones.

GROOVE, POCKET AND FEEL

Mike Sturgis consults the experts to demystify the language of groove

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Image: David Leisser

The vernacular of a musician is sometimes a bit mysterious, weird, comedic or just generally inaccessible to the 'layman'. On the one hand, there are terms like 'accelerando' or many others that are part of a widely accepted musical lexicon that have clear, textbook definitions. But there are other words or phrases that are less conventional and open to an element of interpretation, even amongst hipsters in the music community.

With this in mind, I would like to take on a challenge that makes solving the debacle of Brexit seem lightweight in comparison – that is, to look at the frequently used terms of 'groove', 'pocket' and 'feel' and to try to understand their full meaning. For example, how many times have you heard someone say things like this: "He/she has a killer groove", or: "That guy/girl was so in the pocket", or even: "He/she has an unbelievable feel"?

I'll put it out there at this point that I believe there is some subjectivity involved in what is meant by these terms, though in my quest to decode and demystify 'groove language', I have found some common thinking.

To define all things relating to groove, I went straight to Van Romaine, a man who seems to have stood in line at least twice when it was being allocated by a higher power. Van is one of my favourite drummers and is widely known for recording and touring as a drummer and musical director with artists such as Enrique Iglesias, Steve Morse, Nena and many others. Here's his take on what these three terms mean:

"From my years of experience, groove and pocket are general terms for playing in time along with the other musicians and/or tracks. 'Make sure you play in the groove' or 'he/she has a great groove/pocket' would tend to mean the musician plays in time, for the song and doesn't overplay.

"Feel, on the other hand (in my eyes) relates specifically to the one-of-a-kind stamp and personality of a musician's groove or pocket. It's a view into their soul as well, from my experience. While drummers Steve Jordan and Stewart Copeland both have an amazing groove and pocket, their feels are drastically different. Also, from what I see, the musicians who focus on these three things tend to be the people playing on the most records and tours."

Another heavyweight musician I've consulted, one who has a deep understanding of these concepts from the perspective of someone outside of the rhythm section, is composer, arranger and lead trumpet player Kevin Robinson (Simply Red, Incognito, Tom Jones).

When asked about this subject, Kevin responded: "I think maybe with the exception of 'groove' there isn't one single definition or easy explanation as to what these terms actually mean. The reason I say this is because I think they mean different things to different people and can be applied to several situations, which also means they are all intrinsically part of the same fabric of music production.

"Groove, for example, can be straightforwardly defined as a rhythmic pattern, be it sourced entirely from a percussive instrument (e.g., drums) or as a collective entity, the result of several musicians all playing together. That being said, it's still not a simple case of a

Kevin Robinson

“WHEN WE TALK ABOUT **SOMEONE’S FEEL**, IT’S ALMOST LIKE WE ARE USING ONE SMALL WORD TO **ENCAPSULATE THE TOTALITY OF THEIR PLAYING.**”

rhythmic/chordal pattern being played ‘in time’... There are subtleties of execution involved that link groove to feel, such as a simple slight displacement of part of the rhythm that takes it away from the metronome and will result in the music being played ‘loosely’ – but it can still groove.

“Pocket is a little more difficult for me to define because, for me, it is based almost entirely on feeling... Also, I think that tempo plays a very important role in determining pocket...certain songs, grooves, etc work best at certain tempos, causing them to sit ‘in the pocket’. Of course, individuals can also be attributed as playing ‘in the pocket’, and it’s obvious when they’re not. So basically, there is a lot of subjectivity involved largely based on skill, experience and emotional maturity.”

Neuroscientist and musician Daniel Levitin is the author of *This Is Your Brain On Music*, a book that analyses how our brains interpret music and the subsequent ▷

Van Romaine

neural impulses that result when listening to it. When Levitin talks about groove in his book, he aligns with Van and Kevin, but also blurs a little bit into that loosely defined area of 'feel': "Groove has to do with a particular performer or particular performance, not with what is written on paper. Groove can be a subtle aspect of performance that comes and goes from one day to another, even with the same group of musicians.

"Musicians generally agree that groove works best when it is not strictly metronomic – that is, when it is not perfectly machine-like. Although some danceable songs have been made with drum machines, the gold standard of groove is usually a drummer who changes the tempo slightly according to aesthetic and emotional nuances of the music; we say then that the rhythm track, that the drums, 'breathe'."

Hearing from these experts has been helpful for me, and I'm pleased to say that my own thinking on this subject is fairly aligned with their opinions. For me, the terms 'groove' (when used as a noun) and 'pocket' are usually referring to the quality and consistency of someone's timekeeping (both as an individual and/or in the context of an ensemble) and are virtually interchangeable in their usage.

Therefore, we can say, 'They have a great groove/pocket' and be fairly confident that this refers to their ability to play in time, both on their own and with others. However, a great groove/pocket can also be a collective experience (or 'entity', as Kevin Robinson suggested) that is created from an ensemble, usually from individual musicians who all have this quality in abundance.

"THE MUSICIANS WHO FOCUS ON THESE THREE THINGS TEND TO BE THE PEOPLE PLAYING ON THE MOST RECORDS AND TOURS."

That brings me to 'feel', which as described above seems to be an even larger concept than groove or pocket, although I still believe the terms are inextricably linked. When we talk about someone's feel, it's almost like we are using one small word to encapsulate the totality of their playing. While there may be more, here are the key concepts that I believe comprise a musician's feel:

Timing – hence the overlap with groove and pocket.
Execution – the level of technique and the ability to actually play what is required, with pin-point accuracy not necessarily being better depending on the genre.
Dynamics – as appropriate for the chosen genre.
Content – the ability to play appropriately as each musical context requires.
Sound/Timbre – which includes tuning.
Intuition – the ability to respond appropriately to the music and other musicians.

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Get Groovy
If you would like to read more on these concepts, I can recommend some great reading – and if you have any thoughts that you would like to share, I would love to hear from you: mikesturgis@dime-online.org.

Till then, I wish you well in your pursuit of the ultimate groove, pocket and feel!

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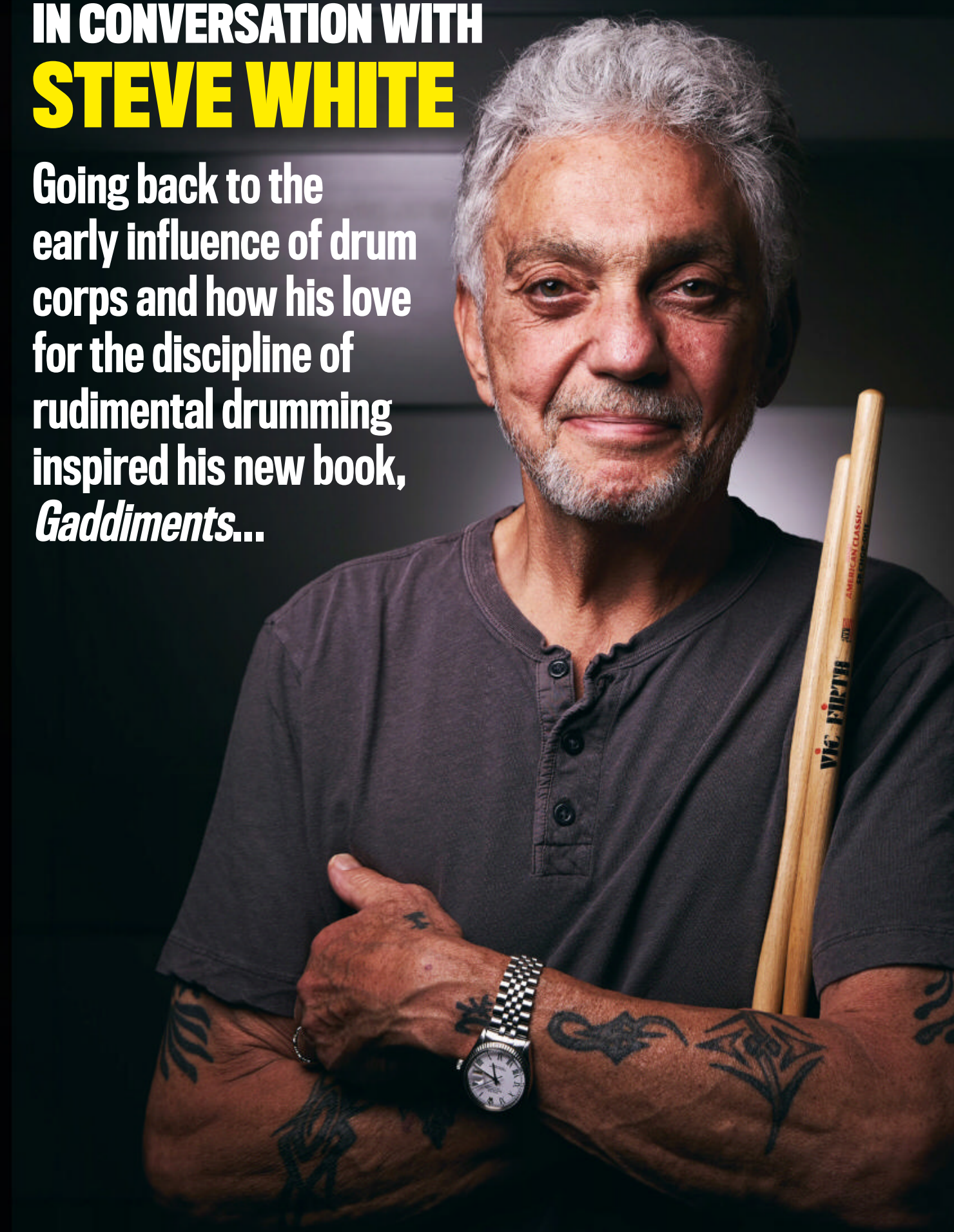
IN CONVERSATION WITH
STEVE WHITE

Going back to the early influence of drum corps and how his love for the discipline of rudimental drumming inspired his new book, *Gaddiments*...



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Six of the Best

Image: Erik Jacobs

TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON

Challenging charts, odd times and funk grooves on a jazz kit care of Terri Lyne Carrington

Esperanza Spalding

Track: 'Radio Song'
Album: *Radio Music Society*, 2012

"Q-Tip was the producer. We recorded in New York at the Power Station, but the first couple of songs we did in a small rehearsal studio. Q-Tip had gotten there the day before and had taped up the drums, so they really sounded good and thuddy. We tracked 'Radio Song' first. He recorded the rehearsal, we heard it back and it sounded really good. I said, 'I'm not going to play it any better, you just have to keep this'."

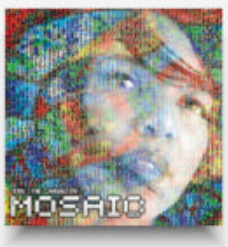
Terri Lyne Carrington & Social Science

Track: 'Trapped In The American Dream'
Album: *Waiting Game*, 2019

"I like that song. It's in '5', which you don't necessarily think about – it should just feel good. We opened the record with it – we felt like it created a band sound. It spoke to all the different people in the band, to all the different genres that influence us. We're all jazz musicians, and it's definitely jazz, but you can hear the influence of indie rock, classical music, hip-hop or opera. A melting pot of styles in that piece."

Terri Lyne Carrington

Track: 'I Got Lost In His Arms'
Album: *The Mosaic Project*, 2011



"I demoed the drums, so I lived with that groove before we got in the studio. It's like a rock groove but with high-pitched, jazz-sounding drums. If I had done that track with more contemporary-sounding drums – a rock, R&B sound – the track would have lost some of its magic. That's a groove I would have played on a big funk kit, so it's interesting it did translate and worked really well. I guess that's why I like it."

Terri Lyne Carrington

Track: 'Michelle'
Album: *The Mosaic Project*, 2011

"When I listen to my students, the playing these days sounds very even, so that's what I was going for. That's not necessarily natural for me, because I grew up in a different time period – I like waves of sound, softness, loudness. I was trying to play more even, which sounds more contemporary because that's how people are playing. When I play that song live it's definitely a lot more bombastic, but in the studio, you have a different approach."

Terri Lyne Carrington

Track: 'Backward Country Boy Blues'
Album: *Money Jungle*, 2013

"That's one going over the bar line, but the idea is to feel the groove of it where you can still nod your head and not necessarily identify a bar count all the time. We recorded that record in two days. I like the grooves I played, but I did re-record that song with larger drums to get the groove a little more happening. Sometimes when I'm producing a record, I don't have so much time to focus on me."

Kris Davis

Track: 'Stone's Throw'
Album: *Diatom Ribbons*, 2019

"I like 'Stone's Throw' because it's a really difficult piece, and I wasn't used to reading things that complicated. I got her to come to Berklee to do a clinic, and she brought this tune. She sent it over – oh my God – this is pretty complex to just get everybody to play it without a rehearsal at a clinic. I picked musicians that I thought could do it, we did it, then she called me to play on the record."

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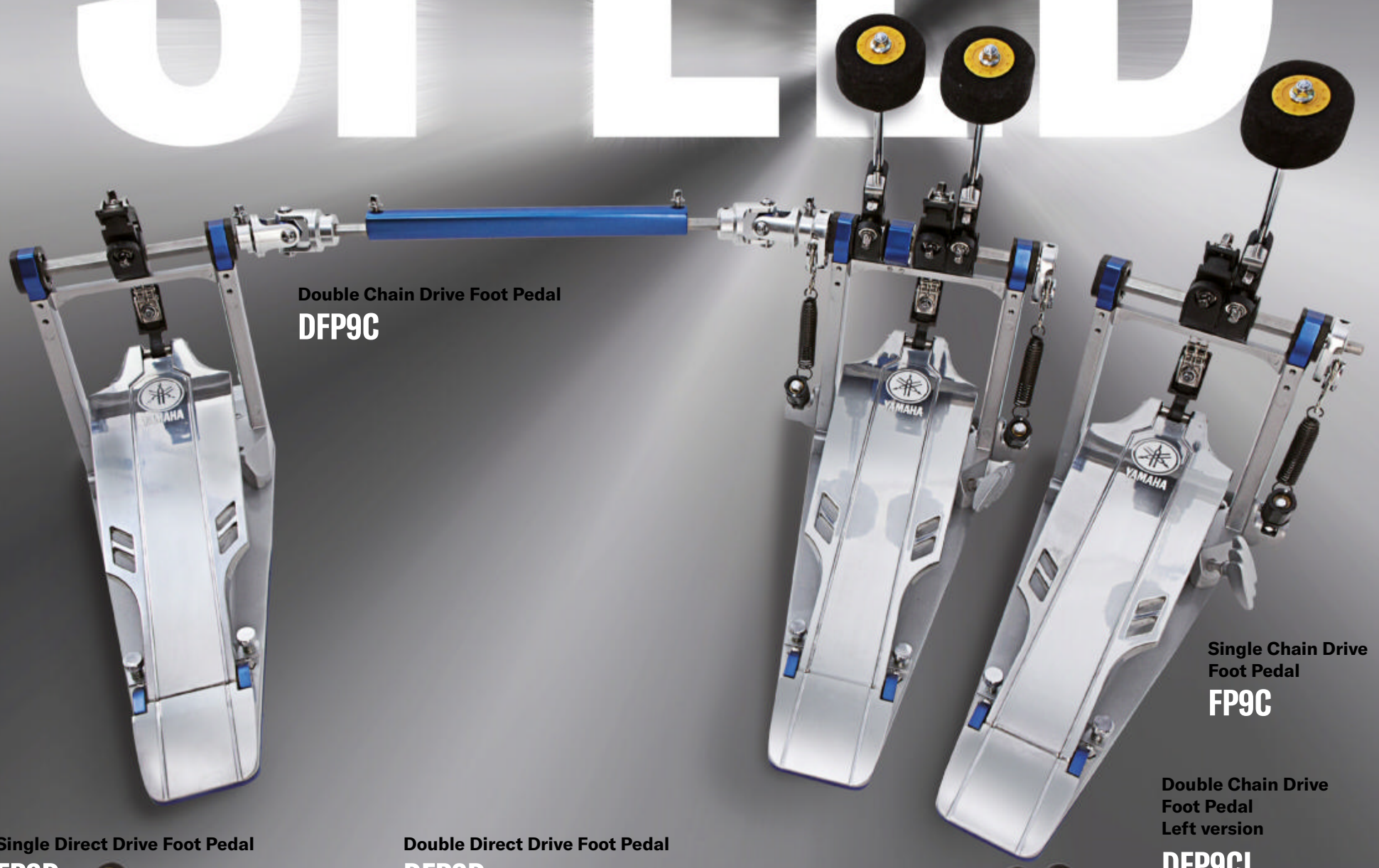

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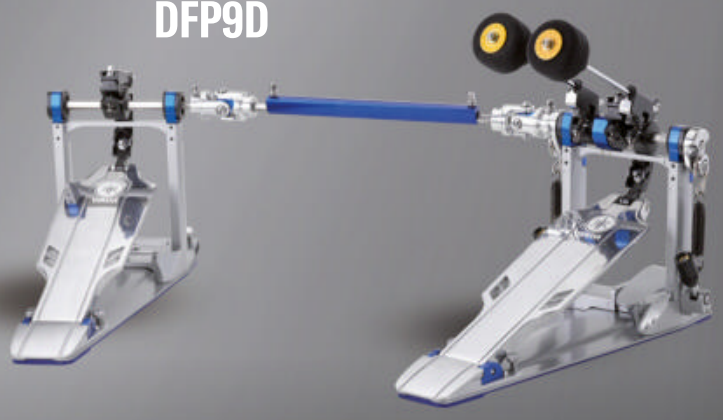

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